ALLEGORY IN ACTION: THE RELATION BETWEEN LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE MEANING IN THE 1590 EDITION OF SPENSER'S THE FAERIE QUEENE

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Declaration of Originality

This thesis has been composed by me, and the work which it represents is my own.

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Abstract of Thesis

Critics have commonly assumed that, in The Faerie Queene, and in allegorical literature generally, the figurative meaning of the text is unknowable in principle to the characters who take part in its literal narrative vehicle, and may rather be discovered only by the text's readers. But in fact there are two quite different kinds of allegory: in one, the figurative meaning of the text does (as such critics suppose of all allegory) constitute a distinct structure or 'world' from the imaginary world constituted by its narrative vehicle; but in the other, the figurative meaning *coexists* with the text's literal meaning inside a single imaginary world. Essentially the same types were distinguished by Christian Biblical exegetes throughout the Middle Ages; but medieval writers theorized the distinction in terms of the fictionality or truth of the text's literal meaning, a characterization which is accurate so far as it goes, but problematic for a modern theorist in that it is designed as an account only of Biblical allegory rather than of allegory more generally, and presupposes Christian piety as the basis of its distinction between allegory's two kinds. Recasting the distinction in terms of the figurative meaning's existence or non-existence inside the imaginary world of the literal narrative allows us to discern the presence of the two kinds both in allegorical literature generally and in The Faerie Queene in particular. In Books One to Three of Spenser's poem, it is primarily for the characters who inhabit the world of the narrative that both the literal and figurative meanings of the poem exist; as readers, we apprehend the two kinds of meaning and the relation between them primarily through their imaginary experience. An imaginary world wherein literal and figurative meanings coexist tends to be structured largely in terms of the concrete relations between the two; an example is the imaginary world which we know as the medieval/Renaissance 'world picture'. I consider and reject the possibility that the structure given to the world of The Faerie Queene by its allegory is similar to that attributed to the world at large by medieval and Renaissance techniques of allegorical interpretation. Rather, Spenser's world is structured by the particular problems of interpretation to which his poem continually returns: namely, the problems of knowing how to act properly in a fallen world, and of how to be received favourably for having acted well.

Table of Contents

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Abbreviations

I have used the following abbreviations in references to books and journals:

The Faerie Queene	*The Faerie Queene. Disposed into twelue bookes, Fashioning XII. Morall vertues.* Unless otherwise specified, references in the text are to J. C. Smith's edition of the poem, cited in the bibliography.
Letter to Raleigh	*A Letter of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke: which for that it giueth great light to the Reader, for the better vnderstanding is hereunto annexed. To the Right noble, and Valorous, Sir Walter Raleigh knight, Lo. Wardein of the Stanneryes, and her Maiesties lieftenaunt of the County of Cornewayll.*
Mutabilitie Cantos	*Two Cantos of Mutabilitie: Which, both for Forme and Matter, appeare to be parcell of some following Booke of the FAERIE QUEENE, vnder the Legend of Constancie.*
Variorum	*The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition.* Cited in full in the bibliography.

ELH	*Journal of English Literary History.*
ELR	*English Literary Renaissance.*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology.*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.*
SEL	*Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900.*
TSLL	*Texas Studies in Literature and Language.*

Introduction (1):

The Relation Between Literal and Figurative Meaning

Descriptions of The Faerie Queene from Spenser's own Letter to Raleigh onwards have regularly defined the poem as an 'allegory'; but the term 'allegory' has been used so variously -- and, at times, so imprecisely -- as to be, itself, urgently in need of definition. Two other terms which, in different ways, have been used frequently either in apposition or in opposition to 'allegory', and which stand in similar need of definition, are 'metaphor' and 'symbolism'. What I hope to set forth in this first introductory chapter is, on one hand, a clear definition of how I will use these terms in my discussion of The Faerie Queene, and on the other, a rationale, based in concrete examples from literature, for using the terms in this way. Of course, with words that have been used as variously as these, there will inevitably be a certain degree of arbitrariness in deciding what, precisely, any one of them will mean for one's own purposes; but in general, I have tried to balance a desire for maximum

descriptive utility with the wish that my use of terms should seem neither obsolete nor eccentric.

Metaphor, allegory, and symbolism, as I shall define them, may be subsumed under the concept of the trope. Tropes are figures of speech -- that is, special uses of language -- by means of which the things that are signified by words become, themselves, signifiers of other things.[1] Thus, for example, conventionally the word 'dragon' signifies a certain kind of formidable reptile which is familiar to us from folk and literary tradition; this reptile, in turn, can be made to signify any number of other things, for instance, the Devil, or King Arthur. Now clearly, 'to signify' in this context does not mean to refer to something that exists in the real world around us: for I may use the word 'dragon' to signify a fire-breathing reptilian monster, and the fire-breathing reptilian monster to signify King Arthur, without having to believe that either fire-breathing reptilian monsters or King Arthur have ever really existed. Rather, the status of the things signified, in either case, is as things which can be *imagined* to exist. Such things are often referred to in literary criticism as 'images', a term which will be satisfactory so long as we remember its connection with the imaginable, rather than supposing that its application must be limited to the strictly visualizable, or that even those things which *can* be visualized *must* be actively visualized on

each reading in order to be considered images. 'An image', for my purposes, means simply 'some one thing that can be imagined', whether this thing be as visualizable as a horse or a ship, or as abstract as love or politics; or, indeed, whether it be an activity, such as cutting or hating, a quality, such as redness or quickness, or even a direction, such as inward or north. For convenience, we may refer to an image signified by a word as that word's 'literal meaning', and to anything which is signified, in turn, through the figurative use of this image, as a 'figurative meaning' of that image.

To proceed, now, to concise definitions of the three terms in question:

Metaphor is the figurative use of a single image. With I. A. Richards, we may refer to the image used figuratively as the 'vehicle' of the metaphor, and to the figurative meaning as its 'tenor'.[2]

Allegory is the coordinated figurative use of a connected group of images -- connected, in the sense that they constitute all or part of a single imaginary world. Sometimes allegory has been described as a species of metaphor, that is, as a single, 'extended' metaphor; but because this description compromises the precise reference of the term 'metaphor' to a single image, it is better to follow the alternative tradition which describes allegory as a connected series of metaphors.[3]

Symbolism is the figurative use of one or more

images in a particular imaginary world to signify other things in the same imaginary world. It is not the contrary of allegory or of metaphor, but something in addition.[4] Thus, metaphors and allegories can be either 'symbolic' or 'non-symbolic'. We can refer to the vehicle of a symbolic metaphor as a 'symbol', and to its tenor as the thing 'symbolized'.

This much by way of definition; I shall now look more closely at each of these figures in its turn.

(1.1) Metaphor

My definition of metaphor as 'the figurative use of a single image' is intended to distinguish it from three things which must be present in order for there to be a metaphor, but which are not themselves metaphors. These are (1) the word which is used as the basis of the metaphor, (2) the image signified by this word, and (3) the figurative meaning attached to this image. (For example, when we refer metaphorically to the 'ship of state', the metaphor is neither (1) the word 'ship', (2) the image of a ship, nor (3) the concept of the state -- but all three of these things are essential to the metaphor, which consists in the figurative use of the image of a ship to mean the state.)[5]

The first distinction, between the metaphor and the word used metaphorically, has been clearly established,

so far as I know, only in Latin rhetorical theory. Aristotle does not distinguish between the two: on one hand, he defines metaphor (Poetics, 1457b7-8) as the act of "giving the thing a name that belongs to something else" ("*metaphora... estin onomatos allotriou epiphora*"); on the other hand, he classifies metaphor as a species of 'word' (*onoma*), treating it, along with the "ornamental word" and the "word altered in form", as one of the alternatives to "the ordinary word for a thing [*onoma... kurion*]" (1457b1-3). By the time that Cicero renders the Greek rhetorical terms into Latin, however, the act and the word have been distinguished: "*translatio*", the Latin equivalent of *metaphora*, is used only for the act of connecting a term to an unusual meaning; the word which is given this unusual meaning is called "*translatum*", 'carried across'. But this distinction between *translatio* and *translatum*, which is maintained, albeit imperfectly, in later Latin rhetorical theory[6], does not survive its being rendered into English. In Richard Sherry's Treatise of Schemes and Tropes (1550), we find *metaphora* or *translatio* ambivalently rendered as "translacion, that is a worde translated", and The Arte of English Poesie (1589), attributed to George Puttenham, vacillates between defining "metaphore" as the "terme... transported" and as the "inversion" by which the word is given its unaccustomed meaning.[7] I hope, in differentiating between the 'metaphor' and the 'word used

metaphorically', to restore something of the Latin precision in this matter.

The remaining distinctions, between the metaphor itself, the image (such as the image of a ship) which it employs, and the figurative meaning (such as the concept of the state) which its attaches to this image, are those for the sake of which I. A. Richards coined the terms 'vehicle' and 'tenor'. When a word, like 'ship', is used metaphorically, it still retains its ordinary signification; this signification is the image which Richards calls the 'vehicle'. The metaphor consists in the use of this vehicle image, in its turn, to signify something else -- what Richards calls the 'tenor'. The vehicle of a metaphor, then, is the literal meaning of the word which is used metaphorically; the tenor is its figurative meaning.

So much for the distinctions between metaphor and its constituent parts. But how does a metaphor come to be? More precisely, how is it that a 'tenor', or figurative meaning, comes to be associated with the literal meaning of a word? There are, it seems, two ways in which this can happen. The first possibility is that the word will be used in a context to which its literal meaning does not apply; the figurative meaning, or tenor, will be the meaning that the context demands. To take an example from Quintilian, if we were to read of a man being "kindled to anger [*incensum ira*]" (VIII.vi.7), we would

know at once to understand the image of being kindled as the vehicle of a metaphor, because anger is not literally a fire. I shall refer to this as the 'text-and-context' type of metaphor. The second possibility is that a commentary will be attached to the word, telling us what its figurative meaning is. Thus, for example, in the seventh book of Plato's Republic, the character Socrates explains to his friends that, in a story which he has just told them about a group of prisoners who live all their lives in a cave lit only by a fire, the cave prison stands figuratively for "the region revealed through sight", and "the light of the fire in it" for "the power of the sun" (517b3-4). I shall refer to this as the 'text-and-commentary' type of metaphor.

Generally speaking, text-and-commentary metaphors are considerably less common in literature than are the text-and-context type. But often rhetoricians and exegetes, when discussing particular text-and-context metaphors, add to them commentaries of their own, stating explicitly what figurative meanings seem to them to be implied by the contexts of the words which are used metaphorically; thus, in effect, they turn text-and-context metaphors into the text-and-commentary kind. For example, to Homer's "Truly ten thousand good deeds has Ulysses wrought", Aristotle adds that here "'ten thousand'... is put in place of the generic 'a large number'" (Poetics 1457b13-15). Sometimes, as in this

instance, the added commentary tells us little or nothing that we would not have surmised from the context alone; but this is not always the case. At other times, the context of a word requires that it bear a figurative meaning, but leaves room for interpretation as to what, precisely, that meaning is. In these instances, the added commentary contributes significantly to the text, because it specifies the figurative meaning of a word more precisely than does its mere context; consequently, the metaphor which is found in the combination of the two works -- that is, in the text plus the added commentary -- is not reducible to the metaphor which exists in the text alone.

To some text-and-context metaphors, there is no possible text-and-commentary equivalent, because no term exists which expresses literally the meaning expressed figuratively by the context in which the word is used. For example, the figurative meaning of the word 'current' in the sentence, 'There is a powerful electric current in this circuit', cannot be expressed literally.[8] This species of text-and-context metaphor is called 'catachresis'. Often, the reason for employing catachresis is simply the unavailability of a literal term for the thing meant. Hence Quintilian describes catachresis as "the practice of adapting the nearest available term to describe something for which no actual term exists" (VIII.vi.34). With repeated use, such

catachretic metaphors become 'dead' metaphors; this means that the figurative meaning is no longer attached to the literal meaning of the word, but to the word itself, without the intermediary of a vehicle image. Whenever we are reminded of the vehicle image -- for example, when we are reminded that the image of flowing water lies behind the term 'electric current' -- the metaphor comes back to life.

Other terms which have been applied to particular ways of using individual images figuratively, such as 'metonymy' and 'synecdoche', refer to species of metaphor, rather than to distinct tropes[9]; useful though they are, there will be no need, for my purposes, to discuss them separately.

(1.2) Allegory

According to my definition, the term 'allegory', like the term 'metaphor', refers to one of the kinds of the figurative use of imagery -- that is, to what rhetoricians and literary theorists generally call a 'trope'. My use of the word 'allegory', then, should be distinguished from that of certain other writers, for whom 'allegory' names not a trope but a literary genre.[10] Allegory, as I define it, can be an important characteristic of a given genre, particularly if that genre is considered at a specific point in its historical

development; but it is not itself a genre, any more than is metaphor. Thus, allegory has featured centrally, at different times, in genres as diverse as the beast fable, the dream vision, the morality play, and the epic. But it does not seem to me to be necessary -- as it does to Maureen Quilligan -- to have 'allegory' available as a generic name for works which cannot be classified otherwise.[11] For example, Quilligan's own candidate for such a work, Langland's Piers Plowman, is a dream vision, and can be compared, generically, to other medieval dream visions such as The Romance of the Rose.

Defined as a trope, allegory is closely related to metaphor, and this in two respects. In the first place, metaphors are its building blocks -- whence it can be described as a 'connected series of metaphors'. In the second place, its composition as a whole is analogous to the composition of the individual metaphor -- whence, by analogy with the definition of metaphor as 'the figurative use of a single image', it can be defined as 'the coordinated figurative use of a connected group of images'.

That allegory can be described as a connected series of metaphors means, first, that within a text which is used allegorically, there will be a series of words each of which is used metaphorically (as, for example, in Plato's story of a fictitious people who live all their lives imprisoned in a cave, the "prison" is made to stand

for "the region revealed through sight", and the "fire" in the prison for "the sun" (517b3-4)); second, that these metaphors will be connected with one another, in the sense that their vehicles will be images which cohere with one another so as to constitute all or part of a single imaginary world (as, in our example, the "prison" and the "fire", along with the prisoners, their chains, and so on, present a coherent world to the reader's imagination); finally, that the connectedness of these images will itself be used figuratively (so that, for example, when Plato describes the freeing of one of the prisoners and his being brought out of the cave into the sunlight, this narrative, which links together the individual images that are used metaphorically, is itself given a figurative meaning: "the ascent [from the cave] and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region" (517b4-5)). Such figurative use of the spatial or narrative relations among images, which is not reducible to the figurative uses of the images themselves, is what makes allegory, as a whole, more than the sum of its constituent metaphors, and which allows us to treat it as a single figurative entity, analogous in its entirety to the individual metaphor, and consisting in the coordinated figurative use of a connected group of images.

The analogy between metaphor and allegory may be seen most readily in an analysis of their respective

constituent parts. Just as metaphor is to be distinguished from (1) the word used metaphorically, (2) the image signified by this word, and (3) the figurative meaning attached to this image, so allegory is to be distinguished from (1') the text which is used allegorically, (2') the imaginary world presented by this text, and (3') the figurative meaning attached to this world -- all of which, to our general confusion, are liable to be referred to as 'allegory' in modern literary criticism. On the strength of this analogy, some critics have extended the application of the terms 'vehicle' and 'tenor', which Richards coined for describing the literal and figurative meanings of words that are used metaphorically, to the literal and figurative meanings of texts that are used allegorically.[12]

Understanding this dual relation between allegory and metaphor will help us to understand how allegory comes to be, that is, how a figurative meaning comes to be associated with the literal meaning of a text. On one hand, since allegory is a 'connected series of metaphors', it may come about, at least in part, through the agency of the metaphors that make it up. We have already seen figurative meanings attached to individual images -- to Plato's "prison", and to the "fire" in it -- where these images are parts of a world that is used allegorically. Such metaphorical uses of individual images help to define the figurative meaning of the

passage as a whole. On the other hand, insofar as allegory is itself a single figurative entity, the text which is used allegorically may receive, as a whole, a general figurative meaning -- as when Plato's Socrates introduces his story of the cave with the instruction to his friends to "compare our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this" (514a1-2). Such a general instruction provides a framework for integrating the precise figurative meanings attached to specific images, and for extending figurative meaning to images which receive no specific commentary. There is, then, an interplay between the allegory and its constituent metaphors, the whole helping to constitute the parts and the parts the whole.

With respect to metaphor, we distinguished two different ways in which a figurative meaning, or 'tenor', comes to be associated with the literal meaning of a word: namely, by means of context, and by means of commentary. We noted, further, that text-and-context metaphors are considerably the more common sort. However, when several metaphors are connected in a series so as to form an allegory, it is not normally possible for the individual words to receive their figurative meanings by virtue of their contexts: for a text-and-context metaphor comes about when a word is used in a context to which its literal meaning does not apply, whereas it is a requirement of allegory that the literal

meanings of its individual metaphors make up a single imaginary world, that is, that they share a context to which each of these literal meanings *does* literally apply. Accordingly, with respect to the metaphors that make up allegories, it is, perforce, not the text-and-context but the text-and-commentary kind which is the rule. For example, as we have seen, the Socrates of Plato's Republic offers the kind of explicit commentary upon the words of his own story which we associated previously with rhetoricians and exegetes, whose added commentaries, in effect, turn text-and-context metaphors into the text-and-commentary kind. In Plato's case, because the context cannot do the work of attaching figurative meaning to the words, explicit self-commentary is essential to the working of his metaphors.

As for a passage as a whole, this too may receive figurative meaning either by means of context or by means of commentary. In the first case, the entire passage that is used allegorically stands in a non-literal relation to its context. For example, whereas the following sentence from Cicero, taken in isolation, bears no figurative meaning, we can readily see how it would acquire one merely by being placed in the context of a larger speech whose topic was political rather than naval:

> What I marvel at and complain of is this, that there should exist a man so set on destroying his enemy as to scuttle the ship on which he himself is sailing.[13]

But this sort of allegory, in which the context does all the work, is rare. Indeed, in comparison with its smaller relative, the text-and-context metaphor, the text-and-context allegory is a hard thing to create, for it is difficult to sustain, through a passage of any length, a clear sense that its larger context demands a specific figurative meaning. Furthermore, there is, in any case, no necessity that a passage which is to be read allegorically will be situated in a larger context with which its literal meaning jars. An allegory may be sustained throughout a text, in which case such a 'larger context' will not exist. Or, the passage to be read allegorically may be offered, like Socrates' story of the cave, as a self-contained fable, so that its difference in ostensible subject matter from the surrounding story will not by itself suggest a need to read the passage allegorically. For all these reasons, by far the more common way for an allegory to work is by means of commentary rather than by context, as (to stay with our example) when Socrates says of the cave story, "compare our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this" (514a1-2).

It appears, then, that both with respect to the individual metaphors that make up an allegory and with

respect to the allegory as a whole, with very few exceptions it is commentary rather than context which determines the figurative meaning. But there are two things to notice about the commentaries by means of which allegories generally work.

First, in contrast to the stringent structural demands of creating figurative meaning by means of context, it does not matter where commentary occurs in a work, or even *whether* it occurs in the body of the work, so long as it is considered to be authoritative. Thus, for example, whether the Letter to Raleigh is thought of as a part of The Faerie Queene is critically unimportant, whereas it makes a great deal of difference to criticism whether the Letter is taken to be authoritative as an exposition of the poem's meaning.

Second, the commentary that we find associated with a text which is used allegorically is very rarely complete. Nowhere in the text of Plato's Republic are we offered a complete exposition of the meaning of the cave story. Rather we are given various 'clues' -- the general statement that the whole story pertains to education, and a few clearly spelt out metaphors -- on the basis of which we are expected to construct the story's figurative meaning as a whole. But, as a survey of commentaries which have been written on the story of the cave will quickly show, these 'clues' do not constitute even an unambiguous set of instructions for producing a complete

commentary, by virtue of which we could say that the whole figurative meaning of the story exists in the text of the Republic, albeit in coded form.[14] Even serious and careful readers of such a text will not all produce substantially identical commentaries; on the contrary, there will be fundamental and abiding disagreements between them as to what figurative meaning should be attributed either to the story as a whole or to its individual details. Nor have we any way of summoning up, as an arbitrator among these various interpretations, the 'commentary intended by the author', or even of knowing for certain that the author of an allegory ever fully worked out such a commentary, even in his or her own mind. It is, then, generally no more than an "illusion that the meaning of an allegory resides somewhere inside its text".[15] Consequently, if we should take up the proffered task, as innumerable interpreters have done, and write a more complete commentary on the story of the cave than does Plato himself -- if we should specify its figurative meaning more precisely than does he -- then the allegory which will be found in the combination of the two works, that is, in the Republic plus our added commentary, will not be reducible to the allegory which exists in the text alone.

These two points, taken together -- first, that it does not matter for the purposes of text-and-commentary allegory where the commentary occurs in a work, or even

whether it occurs in the body of the work, so long as it is considered to be authoritative; second, that the authority for creating this commentary is often devolved, in significant part, upon the reader -- mean that, with regard to allegories, the boundaries of individual works have very little force in determining the location of meaning. A single allegory need not be found, and generally will not be found, within the bounds of a single piece of writing. Rather, at least as a starting point, we may think of allegories as spread across a continuum. At one end we may place an allegory in which a commentary is contained in the original work which is, or at least is meant to be, complete and comprehensive in determining the figurative meaning of the text; as an example of this we might take Dante's Convivio. In the middle will be the sort of allegory wherein a partial commentary is contained in the original work, but in which much of the precise figurative meaning is determined only by an added commentary; this is the kind which exists, for example, in the relationship between Plato's story of the cave and any of its scholarly interpretations. At the other end will lie an allegory in which *none* of the figurative meaning resides in the original work, but all, rather, in the added commentary. Much of the allegory of late antiquity and the middle ages falls into this category. For example, medieval commentaries were regularly added to Ovid's

Metamorphoses, giving to the text figurative meanings (usually relating to Christian doctrine) of which the text, by itself, bore no trace.[16] The same could be said of most of the Neoplatonic commentaries on Homer, and indeed, of a great amount of early and medieval Christian commentary on the Bible.[17]

This continuum, as I said, is a starting point only. For the distinction between a work which comments upon another and a work which comments upon itself is not always so clear. As an example, let us take the words of Christ in Matthew 12:40: "as Ionas was thre dayes and thre nights in the whales bellie: so shall the Sonne of man be thre days and thre nights in the heart of the earth." Is this an allegorizing commentary of one work upon another, or of a single work upon itself? The answer depends upon whether we take the 'works' in question to be the individual books of Jonah and of Matthew, or the Bible as a whole. In favour of the former view, we might argue that Jonah and Matthew are entirely distinct in authorship, and that historically, the writing of Jonah will have been as free of Christian intention as was Ovid's Metamorphoses, a work which was also to become an important locus for Christian commentary. In favour of the latter, we might note that the Bible, in spite of its multiple authorship and multiple editorship, has been consciously shaped into a unified whole, and has been known and treated as a whole

by centuries of Christian culture; we might add, lest this point of view seem to depend upon Christian piety, that the structural relationship between the stories of Jonah and of Christ may be non-fortuitous regardless of which story has helped to shape the other.

If we accept that, from a certain point of view, the Bible can be regarded as a collection of separate works, it is a small step to seeing certain works of single authorship in a comparable way. For example, Dante's Convivio, although entirely written by Dante himself, takes as the text upon which its commentaries are written a series of odes, at least one of which he had composed years before and with a meaning very different from that offered by the commentary.[18] So the Convivio is, in a certain sense, very like medieval allegorized versions of Ovid, in that it flagrantly imposes a new figurative meaning upon an already existing text.

Conversely, if there is a point of view from which we can regard the Bible as a single work which comments upon itself, it is a small step toward regarding whole traditions of commentary in essentially the same light, for these too can have their own collective methods of authorship and editorship, and their own unity. A clear example of this would be the medieval tradition of Biblical commentary, to which any new addition had to pass rigorous tests of orthodoxy, based on the perceived unity of the existing tradition, before being admitted

into the canon. It is irrelevant to the judgement of this tradition as a 'literary work' whether its readings of the Bible are plausible renderings of the intention of any Biblical author, just as it is irrelevant to the judgement of the Bible as a whole whether it uses the book of Jonah for a purpose unforeseen to the author of that book. We treat the body of commentary not simply as an exposition of the text upon which it comments, but as an essential part of the work which includes both the text and the commentary, and it is this commented text as a whole for which we should save our literary judgement. (Sometimes a commentary of single or multiple authorship is incorporated, together with the text upon which it comments, within a single book, as in the Geneva Bible (1560) or in Harington's 'Orlando Furioso' in English Heroical Verse (1591). In such cases the possibility of treating the combination of text and commentary as a single work is more apparent. But there is no very good reason, it seems to me, for excluding commentaries not physically bound with their texts from the same kind of treatment. Rather, the pertinent questions are whether the body of commentary is taken to be authoritative, and whether it has a functional unity -- that is, whether its production is governed by a shared set of rules or assumptions, and whether it is conceived of, by its makers and users, as a unified whole.)

But to see how, in practice, an allegorical tradition

can be conceived of as a whole, rather than as a mere succession of rival interpretations, we need to take note of a widely accepted principle, namely that a text can bear, simultaneously, more than one distinct figurative meaning. Indeed, in medieval exegesis -- especially, but not exclusively, in Biblical exegesis -- it is taken for granted that for any one text there will be many figurative meanings. With regard to Scriptural interpretation, not only is it agreed among medieval theologians that there are different *kinds* of figurative meanings -- these being, according to the thirteenth-century scholastic consensus, the typological (which, confusingly, is often called the 'allegorical')[19], the tropological, and the anagogical -- but these are themselves no more than "categories", and "in each of these, the number of mystical meanings in any particular place can be multiplied".[20] Thus, for example, when the Venerable Bede comments that Solomon's temple stands both for Christ's physical body and for his figurative body, the Church Militant, both of these meanings are typological, as distinct from the tropological and anagogical meanings which he also offers (De Schematibus et Tropis II.xii). The state of affairs with regard to the interpretation of secular poetry is much the same, except that in this case, the most common scheme for classifying figurative meaning, from the twelfth century right through to the end of the sixteenth, is one which

divides figurative meanings into just two categories, called the 'moral' and the 'allegorical' (of which the latter, like the typological or 'allegorical' category of scriptural meaning, is not to be confused with the 'allegorical' in the broader sense).[21] But since poetic commentary was never subjected, like Biblical exegesis, to a scholastic treatment which completely standardized its form, variant schemes for classifying interpretations of poetry continue to appear all through this period. At one extreme is Dante, who is inclined to elide the differences between poetic and Scriptural systems of commentary: he seems to suggest that writings in general can be interpreted according to the three-category scheme which had become orthodox in Scriptural interpretation during the previous century.[22] At the opposite extreme is Pierre Bersuire who, well after typology, tropology, and anagogy have been firmly established as the categories of commentary on the Bible, ignores both this and the more common schemes of poetic interpretation to organize his commentaries on Ovid under his own quite different headings, namely the natural, the historical, and the moral.[23] Under any of these schemes, what differentiates one category of commentary from another is simply the field of knowledge to which it pertains. When thirteenth-century Biblical exegetes established that there were precisely three categories of commentary which could be attached to Scripture, they were saying in

effect that there were three fields of religious knowledge, namely sacred history, the trials and progress of the individual Christian during life, and the transcendent mysteries of God and salvation; these fields of knowledge were related, respectively, to the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Father, and furthermore to faith, charity, and hope.[24] A writer like Dante is inclined to attach this same kind of knowledge to all manner of texts; like the medieval encyclopaedists, what is important to him in all things is how it can be related to the sacred.[25] Bersuire's categories of commentary, on the other hand, reflect the view that secular poetry is most naturally related to bodies of secular knowledge; his categories for interpreting the Metamorphoses pertain, respectively, to the sciences of physics, history, and ethics.[26]

Understanding that the texts and commentaries which together constitute an allegory may inhere in a literary tradition as readily as in an individual literary work will allow us to avoid the error of supposing that some exceptional works -- the Bible and Dante's Divine Comedy are the usual candidates -- themselves somehow contain an inexhaustible range of figurative meanings, awaiting only our discovery of them.[27] In fact, the inexhaustibility of figurative meaning is a characteristic not of well-defined individual works, but only of open-ended and expandable allegorical traditions, and not by virtue of

some special property of the particular work to which a commentary tradition is grafted, but by virtue, simply, of the ingenuity of each new generation of commentators. It is a misunderstanding to suppose that either the Bible or any other work is an inexhaustible well of figurative meaning; and it is another misunderstanding to suppose that most medieval commentators thought that it was. In general, medieval interpreters, whether of the Bible or of secular poetry, recognize that the inexhaustible number of figurative meanings which they attribute to these works cannot all be intrinsically present in the uncommented texts. Indeed, the influential Augustinian teaching is that the discovery of a text's intrinsic meaning, while desirable, is of secondary importance, the really indispensable thing being that one's own interpretation -- or interpretations -- are "not opposed to sound doctrine" (Augustine, On Christian Doctrine III.xxvii). Sometimes, at any rate in their interpretations of pagan poetry, medieval commentators actually treat the intrinsic meaning of the text with a wilful disregard: says Pierre Bersuire in the prologue to his fourteenth-century moralization of Ovid's Metamorphoses, "a man may, if he can, gather grapes from thorns, suck honey from a rock, take oil from the hardest stone, and construct the ark of the covenant from the treasures of the Egyptians"; he proceeds with a *tour de force* double reading of each figure in the poem, on one

hand "*in bono*" (Diana is "the glorious Virgin... armed with the bow of pliant mercy and the arrow of prayer"), and on the other "*in malo*" (Diana is "the evil woman, who is said to hold the bow and arrows because she wounds foolish men by plundering them and shoots arrows at them using temptation and lust as her weapons").[28]

The conclusion to draw from all this is simply that we ought to be very careful, when we set about to study an allegory, to determine whether we mean to examine the allegory which is contained within an individual work, or whether we mean rather to examine -- or even to contribute to -- an allegory which inheres in a commentary tradition. For example, almost since the time of its appearance, Dante's Divine Comedy has regularly been treated as if it contained an allegory in which the narrator stands for something like Free Will, and his guides Virgil and Beatrice for concepts such as Reason and Revelation[29]; but the commentary which makes these correspondences resides not in Dante's poem itself but in the tradition of Dante criticism, just as the vast majority of the allegorical meaning which has been attributed to the Bible actually resides not there but in the Christian tradition of Scriptural commentary. The allegory of the Dante tradition, like the allegory of the Scriptural tradition, may well be sufficiently rich and coherent to be an interesting subject of study in its own right (as Robert Hollander has suggested)[30]; but it

should not be confused with the allegory of the Divine Comedy itself, which exists only insofar as the poem itself determines the figurative meaning of its own imagery by means of context and self-commentary. Thus when the character Virgil identifies Beatrice as the "lady of virtue through whom alone mankind ascends" (Inferno ii.76-7), this commentary on Beatrice is a part of the allegory of the poem; but the interpretations of this and other comments to mean that Beatrice is Revelation, or the Catholic Church, or any of the multitude of other things with which she has been equated, are all parts of the allegory of the Dante tradition.[31] Of course, the two things -- the allegory of the poem, and the allegory of the tradition -- are related; like any scholarly commentary on Plato's story of the cave, commentaries on the Divine Comedy build on the figurative meaning that is already there, specifying and giving more comprehensive scope to what is general and partial in the original work. But this honing and extending of the poem's figurative meaning should not be confused with the unearthing of something that is already implicit in it.

Some critics, because they have attributed to works such as the Divine Comedy figurative meanings which in fact belong to the tradition of commentary upon the poem, have supposed that there are two kinds of allegory: one, of which Dante's poem is invariably the exemplar, which

is supposed to contain its figurative meanings implicitly, in such a way that they do not obtrude upon the surface story, but must rather be discovered by the reader; and another, less subtle, in which the figurative meanings are spelt out explicitly as the story goes along, and which therefore do not need to be searched for.[32] Among this latter kind, which is described by the term 'personification-allegory', are classed The Romance of the Rose and Langland's Piers Plowman. Now, such a division, besides erring, as we have already seen, in its conception of works like the Divine Comedy, also cultivates misconceptions about the so-called 'personification-allegories' with which they are contrasted. In particular, it is wrong to suppose that personification, (or the figurative identification of characters in a story with abstract meanings), is characteristic of a particular species of allegory, and one, moreover, which is both less sophisticated than, and antithetical to, the kind of allegory found in Dante. In fact, personification is a virtually omnipresent feature of allegory, and is no more nor less sophisticated than any of its other elements.

Personification may be defined as the figurative use of an imaginary character. A character, for the purposes of this definition, may consist in as little as a single image -- as when a poet refers, without further elaboration, to 'that tyrant, Love' -- in which case the

personification is an instance of metaphor. More commonly, a character may consist in a complex structure of imagery, comprising actions, thoughts, apparel, and so on, the whole of which is given a correspondingly complex figurative meaning, in which case the personification is an instance of allegory.

The bias against personification appears to be grounded in the common supposition that a character who has a clearly specified figurative meaning is somehow less of a character for that fact. This notion probably grows from the idea that such a character is the mere 'fleshing out' of his or her figurative sense, or in other words, that the figurative meaning comes first, and that the character, such as it is, is a subordinate being, created only as a kind of signpost pointing toward this meaning.[33] But such an idea is no more than a hypothesis concerning the author's psychology in composing an allegorical work; it is not based in the analysis of the literary product. For as we have said, most allegory is of the text-and-commentary variety; and commentary can supervene upon a text, attributing to it a meaning which did not govern the text's composition, as easily as it can reveal one which did. We may consider, for example, Dante's commentary on the odes of the Convivio, in which he asserts that the lady whom the odes present to our imagination means philosophy. It makes no difference to the allegory in the Convivio which of the

odes were composed with that meaning in mind, and which were not: in either case, the use of the lady to mean philosophy is an instance of personification. Indeed, because there is no essential difference, in analytic terms, between figurative meanings which the author, personally, has attributed to the characters in a work, and those which are attributed to them by later commentators, we may describe such things as St. Paul's use of Hagar and Sarah to stand for the Old and New Testaments (Galatians 4:21-31) as instances of personification. It may be seen, I think, that such explicit attribution of figurative meanings to characters does not compromise in any way their literal status as characters; certainly it does not reduce them to mere signposts for the meanings that are attributed to them.

There is one final topic to discuss apropos of allegory, before moving on to a consideration of symbolism, and that is catachresis. It might be thought that catachresis, or the species of text-and-context metaphor for which there is no text-and-commentary equivalent, could have no place in allegory, since the metaphors which are connected together to make an allegory cannot normally be of the text-and-context kind. But this is not the case; for often a text which is to be used allegorically includes a word for which a figurative sense is intended, but for whose intended figurative sense there is no literal term. In such a situation, the

only way for the word to receive its figurative meaning is for this word to be repeated within the commentary that attributes figurative meaning to the text as a whole, and for it to receive its own figurative meaning by way of this new context. For example, in Plato's story of the cave, the directions up and down ['*ano*' and '*kata*'] are important features in the structure of imagery which is used allegorically (515e7, 516a5,e4, 517a2-6, *etc.*). But there is no literal term for the figurative meaning which is to be attached to these images. Accordingly, in the commentary which is attached to the story, the words '*ano*' and '*kata*' must themselves be repeated wherever this figurative meaning is intended; and only by virtue of their new context, in the commentary, do the words acquire the desired figurative sense. Thus, Socrates asks his interlocutors to understand, with regard to his story, "that the ascent [*ten... ano anabasin*] and the contemplation of the things above [*ton ano*]" refer to "the soul's ascension [*ten... tes psyches anodon*, literally 'the upward path of the soul'] to the intelligible region" (517b4-5).

The use of catachretic metaphors within an allegory can have repercussions throughout a larger discourse. For example, in the largely non-allegorical discussion of education which follows Socrates' commentary on his story of the cave, the catachretic terms '*ano*' and '*kata*' appear repeatedly. At first they are used with explicit

reference back to the cave story. Thus, Socrates receives agreement that, "if in this point too the likeness... holds" (517d1-2), then just as the people in the story, having once been released from captivity, would prefer any hardship to having to "go down again" into the cave (516d4-e4), so those who have attained full knowledge of the intelligible things "are not willing to occupy themselves with the affairs of men, but their souls ever feel... the yearning for that sojourn above [*ano*]". Later, these terms are used more freely, as when arithmetic is referred to as a study which "directs the soul upward [*ano... agei ten psychen*]" (525d5-6). Here the diction ("*ano... agei*") is still reminiscent of the cave story -- wherein the former prisoner, returning to the cave, tries to free the others and to "lead them up [*anagein*]" (517a5) into the sunlight -- but the reference is allusive rather than strictly commentarial. The eventual aim, it seems, is to 'kill' these metaphors altogether, so that the discussion of education may be unencumbered by the structure of imagery upon which the discussion was originally based. But this requires that an active interest be taken in denying this imagery any legitimate place in the consideration of education, even if the words which conventionally *signify* this imagery cannot be avoided. Thus, when the discussion turns to the educational value of astronomy, and Glaucon suggests that

> ...this study certainly compels the soul to look upward [*eis to ano*], and leads it away from things here to those higher things... (529a1-2),

Socrates rebukes him in no uncertain terms:

> You seem to me in your thought to put a most liberal interpretation on the 'study of higher things [*ta ano*]'... for apparently if anyone with back-thrown head should learn something by staring at decorations on a ceiling, you would regard him as contemplating them with the higher reason and not with the eyes... I, for my part, am unable to suppose that any other study turns the soul's gaze upward [*ano*] than that which deals with being and the invisible... (529a9-b5).

Now, what I have said about the catachretic use of the words 'up' and 'down' in this part of the Republic could be said of many other words as well. For example, another look at the exchange from which I have just quoted will reveal that Socrates is as concerned here to kill the catachretic metaphor of sight as he is to kill that of the direction 'up'. Indeed, a great deal of the imagery which constitutes the story of the cave -- all that which has to do with light, vision, reflection, direction, movement -- is used catachretically, and has the same kind of tenacity within the following, non-allegorical discourse.

The sort of allegory which makes use of catachresis has an important place, then, in Plato's explanation of his theory of knowledge. What is more, it has a significant place *within* that theory of knowledge itself: for it is the mechanism by which one of Plato's four

types of cognition operates, namely the type which he calls '*dianoia*' (which in this context should perhaps be translated, very literally, as 'thinking by means of' or 'thinking through') (511d6-e4). *Dianoia* is exemplified by the procedure of geometers, who speak about ("*peri*") one thing, namely the visible shapes which they draw, but for the sake of ("*heneka*") something else, something invisible and intelligible like "the square as such" or "the diagonal as such" (510d5-9).[34] The language of the geometers, which refers continually to visible things even though their real interest is in things that are not visible at all, "is most ludicrous, though they cannot help it" (527a1-6): they cannot help it, because there are no words which describe literally the things in which they are actually interested. Socrates' discourse concerning education, in which he is forced continually to use, catachretically, the language of the visible, even though it is precisely that which is not visible whose apprehension he takes to be the real goal of education, could be called 'ludicrous' in precisely the same way: like the geometers, who speak *about* their visible drawings, but *for the sake of* something else, Socrates speaks about the imaginary visible world conjured up by his story of the cave, but with quite another object in mind.

As we shall see, Plato's catachretic method of speaking about the intelligible world is adopted

wholeheartedly by later Platonists, and, in turn, by Christians influenced by Platonism -- and not only as a useful means for discussing those 'higher' things for which no literal terms exist, but also as a justification for presuming that whatever texts the Neoplatonic or Christian tradition (as the case may be) considers to be authoritative, regardless of their ostensible subject matter, are themselves properly interpreted as catachretic discussions of these higher things for which no literal terms exist. But before we can explore how, precisely, this justification works, we shall first need to consider the device of symbolism.

(1.3) Symbolism

Every word which is used metaphorically, and every text which is used allegorically, has both a literal sense and one or more figurative senses. But there are two significantly different ways in which these literal and figurative senses can be related to one another, which I shall refer to as 'symbolic' and 'non-symbolic' respectively. The difference between the two may be illustrated by means of an example from Augustine.

To two separate events which are described literally in the Bible -- the Israelites' sacrifice of the passover lamb (Exodus 12:3 *ff*), and the father's sacrifice of the fatted calf upon the homecoming of the prodigal son (Luke

15:23) -- Augustine attributes the same figurative meaning, namely the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (The Literal Meaning of Genesis 8.4.8). Now, two of these three events, namely the sacrifices of Christ and of the passover lamb, take place within the framework of Judeo-Christian history; whereas the third, the sacrifice of the fatted calf, takes place, as it were, in a world of its own -- a world constituted wholly by the little story within which it appears. Thus, with respect to the sacrifices of Christ and the lamb, we can respond to the question, 'Which event happened first?', that it was the sacrifice of the lamb -- and we can answer the question equally well, regardless of whether we believe that either event ever *actually* happened, that is, regardless of whether we believe in the truth of Christian history as understood by Augustine. In the case of Christ and the calf, on the other hand, the same question has no answer, for the two events do not share the context of a single imagined reality: it is meaningless to ask when a certain calf was killed, *relative* to the death of Christ, when for Christ himself the calf in question is fictional. Only in the former case, that of the lamb's sacrifice signifying Christ's, do we imagine a single world within which one event signifies another. Such figurative reference of one thing in a particular imaginary world to another thing in the same imaginary world I refer to as 'symbolism'. Thus we may say that,

although for Augustine it is equally true of both lamb and calf that they refer figuratively to Christ, they differ from one another in that the lamb 'symbolizes' Christ, while the fatted calf does not. To put it slightly differently, while both the lamb and the calf are images which Augustine uses figuratively to refer to Christ, only the lamb is a 'symbol' of Christ.

A symbol is always imagined to partake in the same reality as does that which it symbolizes -- even if this imagined 'reality' is suspected, or believed, to be fabulous.[35] The crucial point is not that the world which we imagine them to share is real, but that we imagine them to share it.

Of course, Augustine does believe that the sacrifices of Christ and of the passover lamb, not to mention the rest of the events in Biblical history, really happened. The world in which Christ and the passover lamb (but not the fatted calf of the prodigal son story) are imagined to exist, he takes to be the world of extra-textual reality. Therefore he can distinguish the way in which the lamb signifies Christ from the way in which the calf signifies Christ by appealing, simply, to the respective truth and fictionality of the two signifying events: the sacrifice of the lamb "was represented not just by words but also by a real act", whereas the sacrifice of fatted calf "is not a matter of... events that really happened" (The Literal Meaning of Genesis 8.4.8). This means of

distinction, which presupposes Christian piety, can be understood as a special case of the means which I have set out for distinguishing the symbolic from the non-symbolic. For a symbol is, by definition, something which exists in the same world as what it symbolizes: granted, then, the extra-textual truth of the gospel history, every symbol of that history must also have a real, extra-textual existence. What Augustine is drawing attention to in his insistence on the real, historical existence of the passover lamb and its likes is the need to preserve a sense of the coherence and wholeness of Biblical history, as against those various commentators who had treated even what the Old Testament presents in the form of historical report as a mere collection of metaphorical signposts, whose coherence lies entirely in their figurative meaning. The procedure of such commentators, he argues, is fundamentally illogical: if, for example, they take the whole significance of the character Adam to reside "in a figurative sense" -- if, that is, they do not treat Adam as a historical personage in his own right -- then "who begot Cain, Abel, and Seth? Did they exist only figuratively...?" Such commentators should "examine the matter more closely to see where their presupposition leads..." (The Literal Meaning of Genesis 8.1.4) -- namely, one supposes, to an undermining of the whole historical scheme of the Bible, of which the genealogies that begin with Adam are an important

organizational feature. Jesus himself (and no doubt Augustine would have expected this point to occur to his readers) is situated within the whole of Biblical history by means of genealogical trees (Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-38). Augustine's concern, that the procedure of attributing figurative meanings to Old Testament imagery must not be allowed to dissolve the sense of a whole and coherent Biblical history, can be appreciated equally well regardless of whether we share his belief in the fundamental truth of this history; for we can, regardless, imagine with him a single history within which the events that have a figurative relationship to one another also have a literal, historical relationship -- as, for Augustine, the sacrifice of the passover lamb, besides referring figuratively to Christ's sacrifice, also precedes it as an earlier event in the same history. What Augustine presents as a reconciliation of the figurative use of Old Testament stories with their historical truth, can equally well be understood as a reconciliation of the figurative use of these Old Testament stories with their imagined historical continuity with the story of the Gospels.

Two things are to be gained by having an account of the distinction between the symbolic and the non-symbolic which does not depend on the distinguishing of true from fictional literal meanings. The first is that such an account allows us to affirm and to describe the

distinction between the two kinds of allegory -- a distinction insisted upon not only by Augustine but by the whole medieval tradition which follows him[36] -- without our having to affirm, as a presupposition of this distinction, the truth of Christian history. The second is that it allows us to understand that *other* worlds may be imagined, besides the world of Christian history, whose imagery is symbolic, but whose literal meanings may not ever have been supposed to be historically true. Such imagery may be identified as symbolic, not by any correspondence with extra-textual reality, but by the fact that it coexists with what it symbolizes in a single imaginary world.

Such an approach would, for example, help to make sense of a debate within Dante criticism over the status of the literal meaning in the Divine Comedy. Charles Singleton argues -- quite correctly, I think -- that many of the images which constitute this literal meaning have a status very like that of the images in the Bible (such as the passover lamb) whose literal and figurative meanings were understood to be simultaneously true; but because Singleton depends on the Augustinian tradition which distinguishes the kinds of allegory on the basis of the truth or fictionality of the literal meaning, he can express the similarity between the Bible and the Comedy only by attributing a kind of qualified 'truth' to the literal meaning of Dante's poem, while knowing full well

that this literal meaning is a fiction.[37] Not only is this an unfortunately clumsy way of explaining the matter, and one liable to provoke rebuttals from critics who suppose that Singleton has been so taken in by Dante's fiction as to believe that it is true[38], but it misses the real respect in which the Divine Comedy structurally imitates the medieval construction of the Bible's meaning. The important point is not that Dante, while presenting his characters as having figurative meanings, also presents them, in some sense, as *real people* -- for all narrative fictions ask us to *imagine* that their characters are real -- but that he presents them as coexisting with their figurative meanings, within a single imaginary world. As Singleton observes, the Beatrice of the Comedy "is both the Florentine woman who died in 1290 and a person whom Virgil can recognize at once as that 'lady of virtue through whom alone mankind ascends'"[39]; she is *both*, precisely insofar as Dante's imaginary world is one unified world, within which the character Beatrice bears, simultaneously, both a literal and a figurative meaning. For this reason and no other, Dante's Beatrice is akin to Augustine's passover lamb, and to all the other Biblical images which Christian interpreters construe as bearing two meanings within the single world of Christian history; and in this respect alone, it is appropriate to refer to Dante's Beatrice as a symbol, and to Dante's allegory as symbolic.

Another medieval work which, in imitation of Christian history, makes extensive use of symbolism is the anonymous Quest of the Holy Grail. The book announces a large number of figurative meanings for its imagery. We are told, for example, that the coming of Sir Galahad is to be "compared to the coming of Jesus Christ" -- not, of course, in the heretical sense that Galahad is to be understood as another incarnation of God, but, simply, in the sense that the knight's actions may be referred figuratively to the deeds of Christ. Thus, in the adventure in which Galahad opens a haunted tomb and casts out from it the body of a "wicked and recreant Christian",

> The tombstone covering the body signifies the obduracy of this world, which was so rife when Our Lord came down to earth that He met with nothing else... [and] the dead body signifies mankind, for men had persisted so long in their obduracy, that they lay dead and blind beneath the weight of the sins they had committed down the years. This blindness was exposed by the advent of Jesus Christ.[40]

Now, obviously enough, the literal meaning of this story is not historically true, for there never was a Sir Galahad to perform such a deed. Nevertheless, this allegory is better compared to Augustine's figurative use of the passover lamb -- and of the rest of the Biblical imagery for which he claimed a real historical existence -- than to his use of the fatted calf, whose existence he considered to be fictional. For like the passover lamb,

Sir Galahad is unambiguously presented as existing in the same world as that which he signifies: this is clearly established, for example, by the fact that Galahad himself is the addressee of the above explanation of the figurative meaning of his actions -- an explanation to which he humbly responds "that he had never thought the adventure held so high a meaning".[41] Galahad's figurative relationship to Christ is something that exists *within* the imaginary world which he inhabits.[42] We may say, then, that Sir Galahad and his adventures are *symbolic* of the life and deeds of Christ.

This instance of Galahad's coming to understand the figurative meanings of his own actions shows just how concretely the coexistence of symbol and symbolized inside a single world may be portrayed. Not only does Galahad know more about his own deed as a result of having had its figurative meaning explained to him, but he actually revalues the deed, seeing it as more significant than he had believed it to be as he performed it. Something comparable happens to another of the characters in the story, when Sir Melias, having been gravely wounded by a pair of knights, is rescued by Sir Galahad and brought to an abbey to be healed. Neither Melias, nor Galahad, nor the monks who treat the wound imagine that the injury has any special significance, until Sir Galahad mentions to the monks that it was received "'in seeking the Holy Grail'".

> "What," asked one of the brethren, "is this Quest then begun?"
> "Indeed it is, and we are both companions."
> "Then by my faith," said the monk, "I tell you, Sir Knight who lie sick, it was your sin that brought this evil upon you."[43]

The monk then asks Melias to relate the circumstances of his wounding, and having heard these, declares that

> "...these adventures pertain without a doubt to the Holy Grail, for everything that you have told me has a meaning which I will interpret for you."[44]

The monk proceeds to explain that, in the course of his adventure, Melias had displayed the sins of pride and covetousness, and that the two knights who had attacked him had 'represented' these two sins; his eventual rescue is to be attributed to God: "'He sent you Galahad, the holy knight, to rout the two knights representing the two sins lodged in you'".[45] Not only does the monk know that, when a deed is performed as a part of the Quest of the Holy Grail, it may be expected to have a figurative meaning, but he understands, too, that the presence of this figurative meaning changes the way in which the literal deed itself has to be seen: not in the usual chivalric terms of mere honour and dishonour, but rather in terms of the righteousness and sin which govern the allegorical interpretation of the deeds of the Quest. Such revaluation of adventures on the basis of their turning out to have figurative meanings is the rule for

the Quest knights: the presence, within their own world, of the figurative meaning of their actions actually transforms the knights' relationships to their own deeds.

Often, an imaginary world which contains symbols also contains an imagined cause of the symbols' existence. This imagined cause, which is supposed to exist inside the same world as do the symbols and the things symbolized, I shall refer to as the 'imaginary author' of the world's symbolism, in order to distinguish it from the symbolism's *actual* author -- namely, the writer or commentator who constructs the allegory in which literal and figurative meanings coexist within a single imaginary world. Thus, for example, God is the imaginary author of the symbolic relationships which characterize the medieval reading of Biblical history: He, it is supposed, composes the events themselves which are reported in this history, in the way that a human writer composes a text, and so is able to build into the structure of events a symbolic function.[46] God is similarly imagined to be the 'author' of symbolic relationships in the Divine Comedy and in the Quest of the Holy Grail. But in some other symbolic allegories, there are very different sorts of imaginary authorship -- as we may observe, for example, in an influential passage from Plato's Republic.

The allegorical use to which the character Socrates puts his story of the cave may be categorized as

non-symbolic: for like the Biblical story of the prodigal son, the cave story is treated as a fable even by its narrator, and so constitutes a world of its own rather than taking part in the narrator's world, to which it is figuratively referred. But Socrates describes intelligible reality by means of another allegory, too, one which is usually referred to as the 'sun simile' (506e *ff*); and unlike Socrates' figurative use of the cave story, this other allegory is symbolic. Not only, that is, are the sun and the sun's relationship with the visible world used figuratively to help explain the form of the Good and its relationship with the intelligible order, but the sun and the rest of the visible world are explicitly imagined as coexisting with this intelligible order inside a single cosmos. Within this imaginary cosmos, then, the sun and its relationship with the visible world are *symbols* of the Good and its relationship with the intelligible. But these symbols differ, with respect to the imagined cause of their existence, from any of the symbols which we have identified in other allegories. Whereas, in those cases, the resemblance between the symbols and what they symbolized was attributed to the providential ordering of events by God, here the symbols are imagined to resemble what they symbolize by virtue of the fact that they are, in the first place, copies of those things. Thus, the sun resembles the Good because, ontologically, it is the

offspring ('*ekgonos*'(506e3)) and likeness ('*eikon*'(509a9)) of the Good. In this allegory, then, the relationship between symbol and symbolized is much more tightly bound up, than in our earlier examples, with the process of imaginary authorship. For the form of the Good is not only what is symbolized by the sun: it is, at the same time, the imaginary author of the sun, and of the symbolic relation between the sun and itself. There is, in effect, a reciprocal relationship between the two: even as the sun indicates figuratively the nature of the Good, the Good, in turn, is imagined as producing in the sun a strong likeness of itself, and so as validating the use of the sun as its figurative representative. Such a relationship between symbol and symbolized shows even more forcefully than our examples from the Quest of the Holy Grail how the coexistence of images and their figurative meanings within a single imaginary world may affect our literal understanding of the images themselves. In the world which Plato asks us to imagine, the concrete relations between the things in the visible order and what they symbolize is essential to our conception of the visible order itself: we imagine these visible things primarily *as* symbolic copies (or '*eikones*') of the intelligible forms.

Plato's way of imagining the visible world was adopted, not only by later Platonists, but by the whole Christian tradition as well. Moreover, this conception

of the visible world was gradually extended to the structures of visual imagery presented by texts, even to those which were understood to be fabulous, so as to create a comprehensive justification for using literature figuratively to refer to whatever were currently imagined to be the truths of the intelligible world. The first step toward this end was the elevation of the finest products of the visual arts -- which Plato himself had disparaged as mere copies of the things seen in the visible world -- to a status on par with the things in the visible world at large, which Plato had described as symbolic likenesses of intelligible reality; revaluation of the visual arts may be found as early as in the works of Cicero, and is well established by the time of Plotinus (in the third century AD).[47] The second step was the extension of this revised status for sculpture and painting to the visual imagery presented to the imagination by literature; this was accomplished by fourth-century Neoplatonists including Iamblicus.[48] Finally, this new theory of literature was applied to Plato's own texts, in order to show that the master himself had both sanctioned, and practised, such a use of textual imagery; this last step was the accomplishment of the fifth-century Neoplatonist Proclus.

Proclus argues that Plato's disparaging description of poetic imagery, as no better than a derivative copy of an already derivative visible world, does not, in fact,

refer to *all* poetry -- and certainly not to the Homeric epics to which Neoplatonists granted a philosophical authority nearly equal to Plato's own -- but only to an inferior kind of writing which perversely takes the visible rather than the intelligible world as its model.[49] What is more, claims Proclus, Plato's own fictions, such as the story of the cave, which are explicitly intended as imaginary likenesses ('*eikones*') of the intelligible order (Republic 515a4,*etc.*), are examples of the superior kind of poetry of which Plato actually approves (In Rempublicam 73.16-22).[50] From here, it is a short step, for Proclus, to saying that the whole allegorical tradition of commentary on Homer -- which by the fifth century AD was itself as impressively rooted in antiquity as were Plato's own writings, and which had established no end of correspondences between the visual imagery of the Odyssey and Iliad and the supposed truths of the intelligible world -- had a comparable status (In Rempublicam 73.11-16). All the imaginary worlds presented by the literature of the Neoplatonic canon were, he could claim, ontologically the copies of intelligible reality, just like the visible world of nature. And just as, in Plato's Republic, the Good is imagined as producing, in the sun, a likeness of itself, and so as validating the use of the sun as its figurative representative, so, in Proclus' scheme, the intelligible order is ontologically the original of all

the imagery of canonical literature, and so validates in advance the Platonic commentators' use of this imagery to refer figuratively to intelligible truths.

As to the question of *why* Homer and the other poets had used visual imagery in writing about the intelligible order, the answer to this was readily available in Plato. Just like the geometers, and like the Socrates of the Republic, the poets (and indeed, the visual artists as well), could be seen as using their visual imagery catachretically, to refer to an intelligible reality for which no proper terms existed. But this catachretic use of imagery in the description of the intelligible was no longer treated, with Plato's Socrates, as "ludicrous" (527a6); the emphasis had shifted, from the fact that the artists "cannot help it" (527a6), onto the fact that what they do emulates the process by which the visible world itself is supposed to come into being. Thus, for example, Seneca explains that "all art is but imitation of nature" (Epistulae Morales LXV.3), not in Plato's sense that the artist looks to the visible world of nature for his models, but in the sense that art resembles nature in the way in which it comes into existence, being modelled, like visible nature, on "the pattern which [Plato] calls the 'idea'" (Epistulae Morales LXV.7-9). Plotinus is similarly unapologetic about the artist's rendering of intelligible reality in the visual medium when he says that the sculptor Pheidias

"did not make his Zeus from any model perceived by the senses, but understood what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible" (V.8.1).

The pagan Neoplatonists' treatment of textual imagery was transmitted to medieval and Renaissance thought largely through the intermediary of the sixth-century writer known to us as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.[51] For Pseudo-Dionysius, who inherits the ideas of the late Athenian Neoplatonism characterized by the writings of Proclus but applies them exclusively to the Christian tradition, both the things in the visible world and the visual images employed by the Bible are symbolic likenesses ("*eikones*") of intelligible reality (Celestial Hierarchy I.3, *etc.*). These likenesses, whether found in nature or in the Bible, far from being "ludicrous" attempts to portray the intelligible in a medium unsuited to its representation, are necessary aids to our understanding: "for it is quite impossible that we humans should... rise up to imitate and contemplate the heavenly hierarchies without those material means capable of guiding us as our nature requires" (*ibid.*). We cannot know God directly; but nevertheless "we know Him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out from Him, and this order possesses certain images (*eikonas*)... of his divine paradigms" (Divine Names VII.3). For Pseudo-Dionysius, then, all understanding of God must be through the catachretic use

of visual imagery -- imagery which God, in his goodness, provides for us, precisely so that we may use it catachretically.

The principles on which Pseudo-Dionysius bases his figurative interpretation of nature and Scripture serve also as a guide for his own catachretic use of imagery to convey metaphysical doctrines. Thus, he regularly speaks of the invisible objects of religious contemplation in the language of vision (for example, he describes them as sending forth a "beam [*aktina*]" which, entering "the eye of our intelligence [*to noeron omma*]" grants us "enlightenments [*ellampsesin*]" (Divine Names I.2, Celestial Hierarchy XV.1, etc.)) while at the same time withdrawing the ordinary meaning of this terminology, just as Plato's Socrates withdrew from Glaucon the ordinary meaning of 'gazing upward':

> If only we lacked sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge. For this would be really to see and to know: to praise the Transcendent One in a transcending way...
>
> (Mystical Theology II).

The structure of imagery which Pseudo-Dionysius uses catachretically in his figurative account of intelligible reality is recognizably indebted to that which Plato had used for similar purposes in the Republic. In particular, throughout the Pseudo-Dionysian writings, the notion is never far from us that God is, figuratively

speaking, a sun, who is located somewhere 'above' ('*ano*') our world. For example, explaining that "the goal of a hierarchy... is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God", he writes:

> Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendour they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale...
>
> (Celestial Hierarchy III.2).

In other words, every being subordinate to God mimics God's sun-like radiance, dispensing "light" to its own subordinates just as God dispenses "light" to the whole of creation. The principle that every being is a likeness ('*eikon*') of God is developed according to the notion that God is the transcendent paradigm of the sun, so that every symbolic *eikon* of God, in resembling Him, comes, in effect, to resemble also that one indispensible symbol, the sun.

The two sorts of imaginary authorship which we have examined -- that which characterized Augustine's typological readings of the Bible, and that which Pseudo-Dionysius brought to the Christian tradition from the late pagan Neoplatonism of Proclus -- merged to form a composite world for the medieval imagination, rich in both kinds of symbolism, which survived, largely intact,

until the beginning of the seventeenth century. On one hand, works like the medieval Bestiary extended the idea that God, as author of the world, composes the things and events which make it up in such a way as to give them symbolic reference: thus, for example, the behaviour of the pelican, which is supposed to feed its young with its own blood, is designed by God to remind us of the sacrifice of Christ.[52] On the other hand, the idea that every domain has its natural ruler -- as, for example, the lion rules the beasts, the eagle the birds, and a rightful king each human nation[53] -- extended the principle that beings subordinate to God, because they are his *eikones*, naturally resemble Him with respect to their relation to their own subordinates. In sum, the whole structure of the medieval and Renaissance world is deduced from the kinds of symbolism that are imagined to operate within it. It will be my contention, in the following chapters, that a similarly strong claim can be made with respect to the imaginary world presented to the reader of Spenser's The Faerie Queene.

Notes to Introduction (1):

[1] For 'trope' as a subgenus of the 'figures of speech', see for example Holman 185. My definition of a trope is based to a large degree on Saint Augustine's insightful and influential description of the way in which figurative meaning is related to the literal meanings of words: figurative meaning occurs, he explains, "when the things themselves which we indicate by [their] proper names are used to signify something else, as we say *bos*, and understand by that syllable the ox, which is ordinarily called by that name; but then further by that ox understand a preacher of the gospel, as Scripture signifies, according to apostle's explanation, when it says: 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.' [1 Corinthians 9:9]" (On Christian Doctrine II.x).

[2] Richards 96-7.

[3] It is not uncommon to find both these traditions expressed by a single author or even within a single treatise. The clearest classical precedent for treating allegory as a species of metaphor is Cicero's Orator, which argues that allegories, "from the point of view of classification" should be regarded as "metaphors [*translationes*]" (xxvii); in the Renaissance, Wilson's Arte of Rhetorique (1560) defines allegory as "none other thing, but a Metaphore, used throughout a whole sentence, or oration" (p. 176), and Puttenham's [?] The Arte of English Poesie (1589) as "a long and perpetuall Metaphore" (p. 187). The alternative tradition, which I will follow, springs from Cicero's De Oratore, which argues that "the figure... consisting of a series of several metaphors strung together" is not itself a metaphor, because unlike these other figures it "is a matter... not of a word but of a sentence [*not verbi sed orationis*] (III.xliii); thus Wilson distinguishes the "tropes of a worde", including metaphor, from the "tropes of long continued speeche or sentences", which include

allegory (p. 172), and Puttenham [?] similarly distinguishes the tropes of "single words" from those "of the whole and entier speech" (p. 178). See also Quintilian, who writes that allegory "is generally produced by a series of metaphors [*continuatis translationibus*]" (VIII.vi.44).

[4] Definitions of allegory and symbolism as mutually exclusive spring mainly from Coleridge's contrasting of the two (e.g. "Statesman's Manual", p. 30). But even for Coleridge, what distinguishes the symbolic from the allegorical is something that the symbol has *in addition*, namely that it "partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible"; it is this imagined *ontological* relation of symbol and symbolized which I describe as the essence of symbolism, as opposed to 'mere' allegory or metaphor.

[5] The ship of state has, of course, a long history both as a trope and as a rhetorical handbook's example of a trope: see for example Horace (Ode I.xiv), Quintilian (VIII.vi.44), and Puttenham [?] (III.xviii -- p. 187).

[6] See for example Quintilian VIII.vi.4ff, Erasmus I.16ff.

[7] Sherry 40; Puttenham [?] 178-9.

[8] This example is borrowed from Soskice 93-96.

[9] See for example Cicero, De Oratore III.xliii, Orator xxvii.

[10] See for example Quilligan 13-15.

[11] Quilligan 23.

[12] See for example Berger (1957) 34, Roche 4, Kouwenhoven 9.

[13] This passage is quoted in Quintilian VIII.vi.47; the rest of the speech is lost.

[14] For one such survey, and an indication of the degree to which scholars have disagreed as to the figurative meaning of the cave story, see Cross and Woozley 207-228.

[15] Gordon Teskey, "Allegory", in The Spenser Encyclopedia 16*ff*.

[16] See for example Pierre Bersuire, The Moral Reduction, Book XV: "Ovid Moralized", in Minnis and Scott 367ff.

[17] Re. Neoplatonic commentaries on Homer, see Wallis 135-7; for a treatment of early Christian readings of the Bible, see Hanson, esp. comments on Clement and Origen, pp. 117-20. See also Honig 26-7.

[18] Wicksteed, in the appendix to Dante's Convivio (1924), writes: "We have to ask, then, whether we can accept all the love poems on which Dante comments... in the Convivio as really having been addressed in the first instance to philosophy. It is clear that we cannot... We shall be safer in basing our judgment as to the Lady of the Window and the ode that concerns her [Ode I in the Convivio] upon the internal evidence of the Vita Nuova and the ode itself, than upon the express assertions, avowedly made with a purpose, of the Convivio" (431ff). See also Minnis and Scott 379.

[19] Medieval writers who used the term 'allegorical' to refer specifically to what I have called the typological sense of scripture recognized that the word 'allegory' could also be applied to all the figurative senses collectively. Thus Aquinas, for example, notes that for some writers (most importantly for Augustine), "allegory alone stands for the three spiritual senses" (Summa Theologica I.i.10); and the Letter to Can Grande, attributed to Dante, explains that "although these mystical meanings are called by various names, they may one and all in a general sense be termed allegorical, inasmuch as they are different (*diversi*) from the literal or historical; for the word 'allegory' is so called from the Greek *alleon*, which in Latin is *alienum* (strange) or *diversum* (different)" (Dante (1920) 199).

[20] Nicholas of Lyre, Literal Postill on the Bible, qtd. Minnis and Scott 268.

[21] Minnis and Scott 324. A twelfth-century example is Alan of Lille's prose prologue to the Anticlaudianus, pp. 40-1 in Sheridan's translation; a sixteenth-century example, Harington's commentary on his translation of the Orlando Furioso -- see especially the introduction, pp. 5-6.

[22] Convivio 63-4. There is some controversy over this passage. I am following Singleton's interpretation in "Dante's Allegory" (1967) 92, which seems to me to be truer to the text than those of Robert Hollander (1969) 32-40, and Minnis and Scott 382-3. See also Dante's [?] Epistle to Can Grande, which explicitly prescribes the 'theological' senses for interpreting the Commedia itself.

[23] Minnis and Scott 324.

[24] Alexander's Sum of Theology, qtd. Minnis and Scott 221; Henry of Ghent, The Sum of Ordinary Questions, qtd. Minnis and Scott 258-9.

[25] For the encyclopaedists' view of the natural world as suited to theological commentary, see Whitman 126-7.

[26] Minnis and Scott 324.

[27] See for example Dunbar 279, 500.

[28] The Moral Reduction, Book XV: "Ovid Moralized", in Minnis and Scott 367, 371-2.

[29] All these equations had been made by 1333: see the anonymous commentary of that date qtd. by Robert Hollander (1969) 275-6. Compare the modern reading of Frank 240.

[30] Robert Hollander (1969) 19; see also Michael Caesar's anthology of Dante criticism, which goes some way toward realizing such a study.

[31] Caesar notes the "frequent disagreement among the early commentators about major allegorical meanings, the figure of Beatrice being a case in point: for most she represents theology, but she is also interpreted more generally as a type and figure of the spiritual life (Guido da Pisa) and by Jacopo Alighieri as representing the Bible" (pp.7-8); while amongst twentieth-century commentators, Dunbar alone, for example, claims that Beatrice represents Grace, 'Super-ratio', Contemplation, Theology, the Church, the Divine Nature of Christ, the Will, and the Guelph political faction (see his diagram, p. 98).

[32] Frank 233-4, 237-9; Dunbar 280.

[33] Dunbar 280; Robertson 247-9. The etymology of the word 'personification', 'mask-making', may have contributed to this notion; but the meaning of the term has shifted too much since its coining (see Whitman 269-70) for an etymological interpretation to have any real force.

[34] The meaning of this passage has been widely debated by Plato scholars; a clear expression of the interpretation which I take to be correct is given by Stocks 83.

[35] I am adapting, here, Coleridge's well-known characterization of a "symbol" as something which "always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible" ("Statesman's Manual", p. 30). Coleridge's Christian commitment means that he need not consider the possibility that this "Reality" is fabulous -- a position which I discuss with reference to Augustine in the following paragraph.

[36] See, for example, Bede's distinction between literal meanings which are "factual" and those which are "verbal only" (De Schematibus et Tropis II.xii, trans. MacQueen 50ff), and Aquinas' distinction between "literal" and "parabolic" meanings (Summa Theologica I.i.10).

[37] Singleton (1967) 94-5.

[38] Green *passim*; see also the reply in Singleton (1957) 129.

[39] Singleton (1957) 134.

[40] Quest of the Holy Grail 61-5.

[41] Quest of the Holy Grail 65.

[42] See Tuve 53-4, who finds "in the Queste the unimpugnable evidence of readers *within* the work."

[43] Quest of the Holy Grail 67-70.

[44] Quest of the Holy Grail 70.

[45] Quest of the Holy Grail 67-70.

[46] See, for example, Aquinas Summa Theologica I.i.10, and Nicholas of Lyre, Literal Postill on the Bible, qtd. Minnis and Scott 266. See also Tuve 222.

[47] Cicero Orator 8-9, Plotinus V.8.1. The reappraisal of the visual artist from Cicero through to Plotinus has been fairly widely noted: see, for example, Dillon (1977) 93-4, and Coulter 98-100.

[48] Coulter 102.

[49] Coulter 46.

[50] This and the following citation are by page and line number to Kroll's Greek edition of the In Rempublicam. No complete English translation of this work is available, but helpful translations and

discussions of the passages which I have cited may be found in Dillon (1976) 251-2, and Coulter 47-54. See also the discussion in Whitman 92-8.

[51] Pseudo-Dionysius, aided by his successful adoption of the name of Dionysius the Areopagite (a convert of St. Paul, mentioned in Acts 17:34), was gradually accepted, in the East, during the two centuries after his writing, not only as an orthodox thinker but as one of almost unrivalled authority; after their translation into Latin by John the Scot Eriugena in 858 AD, his works enjoyed similar authority in the West (Wallis 161). His continuing influence is apparent in scholastic discussions of allegory: for example, Aquinas cites his authority repeatedly in this regard (Summa Theologica I.i.9-10). Renaissance philosophers including Ficino and Pico della Mirandola were comparably indebted -- see Karlfried Froehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century", in Pseudo-Dionysius, Complete Works, p. 36.

[52] White 132-3.

[53] Tillyard 27-8, 82-4.

Introduction (2):

The 1590 Edition of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

My aim in this second introductory chapter is to see what can be said in general about the relation between literal and figurative meaning in the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene, insofar as it is presented as the unified work of a single author, Edmund Spenser -- that is, in the first three books of the poem itself, including their proems and arguments, together with the dedicatory sonnets and the Letter to Raleigh, but not including the commendatory verses expressly written by other hands.

Most modern critics investigating the general structure and meaning of The Faerie Queene have given some consideration to the Letter to Raleigh, which might be called Spenser's own essay on that topic.[1] The main point of debate among these critics has been to what extent the Letter is an accurate description of the poem, with the extreme positions marked out on one side by A. C. Hamilton, who asserts that "If the letter is properly read... there are no divergencies with the

poem", and on the other by C. S. Lewis, for whom "the account of the poem given in the Letter to Raleigh is demonstrably untrue, not only as regards its separate individual statements, but also in its whole tenor".[2] What I will be interested in determining, however, with respect to the Letter to Raleigh, is not the extent to which it is adequate or inadequate as a *description* of The Faerie Queene, but how it functions as a *prescription* for reading the poem, or in other words how, as an authorial commentary on the poem, it has influenced the form and the content of commentaries added to the poem by others. My question, as it happens, is one that would make sense neither from Hamilton's point of view nor from Lewis's. For Lewis, the Letter is irrelevant to our actual reading of the poem; for Hamilton, the Letter, "properly read", merely tells us about the poem what it already reveals to us about itself. But both these writers, I will argue, as well as all those who have taken up positions somewhere between their two extremes, read the poem differently than they would have, had the Letter to Raleigh never been written.

One prominent feature of the Letter to Raleigh is its apparent indication that the figurative meaning in the poem may be divided into two categories, which Spenser calls the "general" and the "particular". With one exception (which looks like a slip on Spenser's part[3]), the former pertains to the ethical 'fashioning' of "a

gentleman or noble person", and the latter includes all the other figurative meanings which have been put into the work, such as the complimentary comparisons of Gloriana and Belphoebe to the queen. Not much is said about these "particular" meanings (indeed, since Spenser says at the outset of the Letter that he is concerned here only with "the general intention and meaning" of the poem, not with "expressing of any particular purposes... therein occasioned", his mention of the "particular" meanings of Gloriana and Belphoebe should be thought of as no more than a brief digression from the Letter's stated purpose), but the fact that these meanings are called "particular" rather than "general" seems to indicate that they are to be thought of as isolated instances of figurative reference, not, like the "general" meanings, as components of a coherent scheme of reference which extends throughout the poem.

These categories would appear to have influenced, to varying degrees, most of the schemes which modern critics have used for categorizing the figurative meaning which they associate with the poem. The Variorum edition of Spenser's works generally allows for an "historical" allegory, and in some books for a "moral" or "moral and spiritual" allegory as well; these correspond roughly to Spenser's "particular" and "general" categories of figurative meaning, respectively. More recently, Robin Wells argues for three types of figurative meaning in the

poem, adding the "mystical" to the Variorum's historical and moral categories, while Elizabeth Watson, departing still farther from Spenser's own scheme, invokes four categories: the moral, spiritual, mystical, and political.[4]

Such systems devised by Spenserian critics, however closely or distantly they resemble the scheme suggested by The Letter to Raleigh, are usually described by those who invoke them as expositions of something already present in The Faerie Queene, as levels on which "Spenser writes".[5] But as is perhaps most evident in the Variorum edition, they tend to be used largely for organizing commentary which is being added to the poem, rather than for analyzing self-commentary which is already present in it. Like the medieval categories of Scriptural commentary, they serve primarily as filing systems for the material of an infinitely expandable allegorical tradition, and only secondarily as vocabularies for naming the types of meaning which are already present in the allegorical work. Now it may be true that, like the medieval Scriptural tradition, and as Robert Hollander has suggested of the Dante tradition (see Introduction (1): p. 26), the Spenser tradition may merit study as an allegory in its own right, in which case we would need to know about all these systems and how they are related to one another; but insofar as it is our aim to study the allegory of The Faerie Queene itself, we ought to be very

wary of what we do in invoking any such system of categories of allegorical commentary, lest we find ourselves simply setting up a filing system for commentaries of our own. (This is not to say, of course, that there are no examples in the self-commentary which resides within The Faerie Queene itself of what Watson, for example, would call moral, spiritual, mystical, and political meanings; no doubt there are. But there are also examples of what Thomas Aquinas would have called allegorical, tropological, and anagogical meanings, and for that matter, of what Pierre Bersuire would have called natural, historical, and ethical meanings. The self-commentaries contained in The Faerie Queene could be assimilated to any number of different systems.)

In contrast to these other schemes which claim to describe the structure of Spenser's allegory, the scheme set forth by The Letter to Raleigh is directly affiliated with the poem itself. It has a special value, not in that it may be presumed to have any special *descriptive* accuracy (for it is an open question to what extent the characterization of the poem given by the Letter accurately summarizes the instances of self-commentary in The Faerie Queene), but in that it has generally been treated as an authoritative *prescription* for reading the Spenserian allegory. Consequently, its division of the poem's figurative meanings into the categories of the "general" and the "particular" must be treated as more,

in the first place, than just a explanation of how the poem is structured as an allegory. Rather, it should itself be considered an instance of the self-commentary which constitutes that allegory, and the categories of the "general" and the "particular" not merely as descriptive of The Faerie Queene's meaning, but as partly constitutive of it. In short, this is the over-all view which Spenser himself offers of the figurative meaning of his poem, and the fact that this view has regularly been treated as authoritative by readers and critics of The Faerie Queene has had an enormous impact on the way in which the poem itself has been read in its individual details.

(2.1) Spenser's "General Intention"

The bulk of what Spenser has to say about the "Allegoricall deuises" which he has employed in The Faerie Queene is to be found in his explanation, in the Letter to Raleigh, of the poem's "general intention and meaning". The main thrust of this explanation is that The Faerie Queene offers "doctrine by ensample" rather than "plainly in way of precepts", and that, accordingly, the poem's hero, Prince Arthur, should be treated as an "ensample" of virtuous behaviour, a character whose actions are worthy of emulation. Accustomed as we are to the complexities of the poem

itself and to the even greater complexities of its critical heritage, it is easy to overlook the fact that this description of Arthur's function in the poem is no mere preamble to Spenser's explanation of the actual workings of his allegory, but is itself his most thorough explanation of the sense in which the poem is to be read as an allegory. (As an example of a critic who overlooks this point we may take Edwin Honig, who treats Spenser's discussion of previous epic poets "who have 'coloured' their doctrine 'with an historical fiction'" as something unrelated to his promise to explain "the allegorical meaning of the work".[6]) The commentary which the reader is invited to attach to the poem, at least insofar as this initial account of the poem's "general intention and meaning" goes, is to consist in nothing more exotic than a statement of the "precepts" which Arthur's actions exemplify. In other words, we are to add to the poem, to particular statements of the form 'Arthur did this and that', general statements of the form 'One ought always to do this and that sort of thing'. Similarly, to the actions of the "xii. other knights" who are presented as exemplars of "the xii. other vertues", we are invited to add general comments along the lines of 'The holy (or temperate, or chaste) person will always act thus'.

Of course, to a modern reader, both the proposed task of deriving moral precepts from the exemplary behaviour of the poem's principal characters, and any actual

precepts which might be obtained as a result, will almost certainly seem unexciting; but we should not suppose, on this basis alone, that this task cannot really be the one which Spenser invites his readers to undertake, or that it would have seemed, to him or to his contemporaries, too pedestrian to merit the aura of mystery which is conjured by such language as "darke conceit" and "clowdily enwrapped in Allegoricall deuises". In fact, it is precisely this task which Spenser describes in these terms, and in doing so, he is very much a creature of his age: that this sort of generalizing moral commentary was a part of the tradition of allegorical reading current in his day may be seen, for example, from Harington's moral glosses on the Orlando Furioso.[7] This objection having been laid aside, however, it must still be acknowledged that Spenser's explanation of the exemplary function of his principal characters cannot be a *complete* account of the workings of his allegory, for not everything that Spenser says about the allegorical meaning of his poem, even in the Letter to Raleigh itself, can be explained by this simple model of it.

The most glaring example of the inadequacy of Spenser's account of his "general intention and meaning" in The Faerie Queene is the specific example he offers, also in the Letter to Raleigh, of his "generall intention" with respect to the character of the "Faery Queen" herself. After reporting that Arthur, having

"seene in a dream... the Faery Queen... resolued to seeke her out", Spenser explains that "In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention". Now in one sense, it is easy enough to see what Spenser is driving at here: for if, as we have been told, Arthur is to exemplify virtue, then it is quite understandable that Spenser should wish us to think of him as receiving "glory" for his reward. But in another sense, this example which Spenser offers of the workings of his allegory immensely complicates our understanding of it. For he does not say that Arthur seeks glory; he says that Arthur seeks the Faery Queen, and that the Faery Queen 'means' glory. The assertion of this relationship between the character Gloriana and the abstract quantity "glory" introduces into Spenser's prescription for the allegorical reading of his poem an entirely different sort of relationship between text and commentary from that which the reader has been led to expect by the preceding explanation of how the allegory works. The explanation was that a commentary consisting in ethical precepts should be attached to the actions undertaken by the poem's principal characters; in the example which is given, in contrast, the commentary sets forth not a precept but an abstract quantity, and it is attached not to one of the characters' actions, but to one of the characters themselves.

Thanks to this problematic example, everything

further which Spenser says in the Letter to Raleigh about the "generall intention" of his poem is ambiguous in meaning. He says, for example, that "in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence... which vertue... is the perfection of all the rest". On one hand, this appears to be no more than a restatement of what was said above, that Arthur is intended as the "ensample" of how "a braue knight, perfected in the twelue priuate morall vertues", would behave. According to this reading, to "sette forth magnificence" would mean to conjure up fictional situations in which the virtue is demonstrated. But on the other hand, if we bracket what Spenser says about his "particular" intentions with respect to the characters Gloriana and Belphoebe, it looks as though we should read the following as balanced statements: "In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention"; "So in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence". Taking the statement in this context, it is easy enough to interpret "sette forth" to mean something more like 'personify', and so to understand the statement as a whole to say that, as Gloriana 'means' glory, so Arthur 'means' magnificence. Precisely the same ambiguity attaches to Spenser's subsequent explanation of his intention with respect to the patrons of the first three books: "the knight of the Redcrosse, in whome I expresse Holynes... Sir Guyon, in whome I sette forth Temperaunce... [and] Britomartis a

Lady knight, in whome I picture Chastity." None of the verbs which Spenser uses in this account, to "expresse", to "sette forth", or to "picture", helps us to resolve the ambiguity as to whether these characters are intended as exemplars or as personifications of their respective virtues. On the contrary, how we read this explanation of the functions of Redcross, Guyon, and Britomart depends entirely on how we have interpreted the prior statement, "in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence".

In spite, then, of the Letter to Raleigh's explicit assertion of the exemplary nature of The Faerie Queene's allegory, there is the possibility of seeing a quite different model of the poem's allegorical workings implicit in the actual examples of commentary which Spenser provides. Thus, for example, Jan Karel Kouwenhoven writes that

> ...the Letter defines the Faery Queen, Arthur, Red Cross, Guyon, and Britomart as concepts. These characters are not more or less glorious, magnificent, holy, temperate, and chaste persons but personifications of 'perfect' virtues. So they do not exemplify what they represent: they symbolize it.[8]

Such an interpretation of the Letter to Raleigh leads to the kind of commentary on the poem in which

> We are told that in the episode of the Wandering Wood, the [Redcrosse] knight is Holiness, Una is Truth, Error is obvious error: *ergo*, the episode

> means that Holiness defeats Error with the aid of Truth.[9]

This way of reading The Faerie Queene was once very popular among commentators, and in spite of the severe drubbing it has received in recent decades at the hands of such noted critics as A. C. Hamilton and Thomas P. Roche[10], its influence is by no means exhausted. Perhaps because we are not used to thinking of exemplification as a species of allegory, we can easily assume that Spenser's claim to "sette forth" or "expresse" the virtues in the poem's principal characters must mean that these characters are intended as personifications, when in fact it would be equally reasonable to read this claim as a restatement and a further application of what was said earlier in the Letter about Arthur's exemplary role. And in any event, there seems to be no such ambiguity in the case of the Faery Queen herself, who is said simply to "meane glory". It remains a question for critics, then, how to reconcile the two types of allegory which are attributed to the poem by the Letter.

An extreme response, and an unconvincing one, is that of Kouwenhoven, who, having concluded that Spenser describes Arthur and the rest as personifications rather than exemplars of their respective virtues, bends the Letter's earlier explanation that the poem offers "doctrine by ensample" to fit this conclusion. Kouwenhoven's claim that "ensample", as Spenser uses it,

does not mean "literal *exemplum*"[11], looks very weak in view of the fact that Spenser explains his intention to provide "doctrine by ensample" by analogy with the method of Xenophon, who "in the person of Cyrus and the Persians fashioned a gouernment such as might best be" -- a pretty clear instance of a "literal *exemplum*". More plausible readings of the Letter make room in their interpretations for both personification and exemplification, either by treating these as two separate types of allegory which operate separately in the poem, or by envisioning a single allegorical structure for the poem which is complex enough to incorporate both.

An elegant example of the first sort of reading is the interpretation of the poem propounded by John Erskine Hankins. He writes:

> In moral allegory Spenser's method is twofold. A character may be an *exemplum* or a type of a particular virtue or a particular vice. But he may also be the virtue or vice itself as it presents itself within the soul of the individual man; or he may be a faculty of the soul capable of being influenced by virtue or vice... In such a case he is never a person but is a quality or impulse within the individual soul. The interior of the soul is the battle-ground on which the action is fought.[12]

In the first type of allegory, which Hankins calls "exemplification" or "external allegory", "Redcross is a holy man, Guyon a temperate man, Britomart a chaste woman, Artegall a just man, etc."[13] In the second type, in contrast, which Hankins calls "internal allegory",

"only one person is concerned, the entire action taking place within his soul. Holiness, temperance, chastity, justice are not persons but are qualities of his soul which may be either strengthened or weakened by his conduct."[14] Such "internal allegory", as Hankins conceives it, is analogous to the kind found in Prudentius' Psychomachia, where a pitched battle between characters named after the virtues and vices signifies the individual Christian's war against temptation.[15]

Hankins's interpretation of the Letter to Raleigh is based, to a considerable extent, on a comparison with the preface which was written by Tasso expounding the allegory of his own poem, Gerusalemme Liberata.[16] Now, as Hankins says, Tasso's Allegory of the Poem clearly did influence Spenser in his composition of the Letter to Raleigh; but it is not entirely satisfactory to see the latter, as Hankins appears to do, as simply a less clearly expressed equivalent to the former. For it is not simply that Spenser does not clearly say, as Tasso does, that there are two separate types of moral interpretation to be made of his poem, one which treats the principal characters as exemplars, and the other which treats them as personifications; on the contrary, he seems actually to imply that Arthur, in his capacity as an *exemplary* knight, is himself the beneficiary of the "glory" *personified* by the Faery Queen. In other words, the one figure most clearly described by the Letter to

Raleigh as a personification is offered as signifying, not something which pertains to "the soul of any man or of any woman", but something which pertains *to Arthur specifically.* So if, insofar as the characters are treated as personifications, the action in which they are involved is to be thought of as taking place "within the individual soul", then that individual soul, on the evidence of the Letter to Raleigh, must be Arthur's. The poem's action, interpreted as "internal allegory", takes place inside the mind of a fictional character, who himself partakes of the action insofar as it is interpreted as exemplary. This intertwining of personification and exemplification, for which there is no precedent in Tasso's account of Gerusalemme Liberata, is what Hankins must specifically deny in order to interpret The Faerie Queene's "external" and "internal" meanings as two separate species of allegory which operate separately in the poem.[17]

The other alternative, that the poem has a single allegorical structure complex enough to incorporate both personification and exemplification, is championed by all those modern critics who take seriously the notion that (as Pauline Parker puts it), "In actual fact, the whole action of all six books and all the land of faerie with its forests, castles, and seashores, exist in Arthur's soul, and there only."[18] Among these are A. C. Hamilton, James Nohrnberg, and Alastair Fowler.[19]

An incidental benefit of conceiving Arthur as, in one sense or another, a 'containing' figure for the action of The Faerie Queene, and one which has been noted by more than one critic, is that it gives Arthur the kind of central role in the poem which it seems he should have, given the emphasis placed upon him by the Letter to Raleigh.[20]

The principal difficulty for such an interpretation is how to account for Arthur's own presence inside the action which supposedly takes place inside him -- a problem which does not arise in interpreting the Psychomachia or the Gerusalemme Liberata, because in those poems an identity is never asserted between the 'containing mind' and any of the characters whose actions signify its internal struggles. Fowler addresses this difficulty with the suggestion that, if Arthur the exemplary knight is a 'containing figure' for the action of the poem, such that the "other characters... serve to objectify traits of his personality", then the Arthur who appears inside the poem cannot himself be this exemplary knight, but must instead be a "fictive self", representing this exemplary knight in the same way that a character inside a dream often represents the dreamer.[21] Nohrnberg suggests a comparable distinction between the 'magnificent' Arthur promised by the Letter and the Arthur delivered by the poem, who instead of fully realizing his virtue, it seems, "moves about like a man

in a dream".[22] The obvious precedents for such interpretations of The Faerie Queene, although neither of these critics invokes them, are allegorical dream-visions such as The Romance of the Rose and Piers Plowman, in which the character who experiences most of the poem's action is clearly identified as the dream-persona of the narrator. The difference, of course, is that, if the Arthur whom we see acting in The Faerie Queene is a dream-persona or something similar, then we never catch a glimpse of Arthur the dreamer, but must construe his existence as well as his exemplary moral qualities entirely from the rudimentary commentary which Spenser attaches to his poem by way of the Letter to Raleigh.

The alternative to conceiving of two distinct Arthurs, one the exemplary knight who desires glory, the other the dream-persona whose quest for the Faery Queen represents that desire, is more difficult to conceive of clearly; I will venture to explain it by analogy with the way in which Spenser attributes a figurative meaning to the action of the second canto of the poem's first book. The 'argument' to this canto reads as follows:

> The guilefull great Enchaunter parts
> The Redcrosse Knight from Truth:
> Into whose stead faire falshood steps,
> And workes him wofull ruth.

This argument constitutes an allegorizing commentary upon the action which it introduces. It seems quite

clearly to assert that the character Una 'means' truth, and Duessa falsehood, just as, in the Letter to Raleigh, the Faery Queen was said to "meane glory". In other words, the argument does not merely refer to the fact that Una is "true" (I.iii.2), that is, that she *exemplifies* truth; it asserts that she *signifies* truth itself. Similarly, within the framework of this commentary, Duessa does not exemplify but signifies falsehood. But what are the two imaginary worlds conjured up by text and commentary respectively? According to the text, that is, to the body of the second canto, the Redcross knight is parted from his companion Una by the wiles of Archimago, and Duessa takes her place. According to the commentary, the Redcross knight is parted from truth by the wiles of Archimago, and falsehood takes its place. What the commentary does *not* say is that holiness is parted from truth by hypocrisy. It does not, in other words, describe a 'psychomachia' of abstract forces, taking place within the mind of an unnamed person, but tells us something about the fictional characters Redcross and Archimago. There are two ways in which we could make sense of this. The first would be to suppose that the Redcross knight whom we see acting in the poem is a dream-persona, or something of that sort, for the 'real' Redcross knight, who does not appear except in this brief commentary, and that the dream-persona's separation from Una signifies the 'real'

knight's lapse into error. The second is to see the commentary referring back to the very same imaginary world as was described by the text, but with a different significance. In other words, the figurative significance which is attached to what is said literally to happen, *also* literally happens, and in the same imaginary world: Archimago separates Redcross from Una, *and* he separates Redcross from the truth in the sense that he inculcates in him false beliefs about Una's character.

Something similar to this second solution could be proposed as an alternative to the notion that there are two distinct Arthurs, one who dreams the poem's action, and the other who participates in the action as his dream-persona. The text, that is, the poem itself, tells us that Arthur seeks the Faery Queen; the commentary on this action in the Letter to Raleigh appears to say that Arthur seeks glory. What the commentary says, as much as what the text says, is literally true of the Arthur who appears in the poem, who has "great desire of glory and of fame" (II.ix.38). Indeed, Arthur's persistence in seeking the Faery Queen, marriage to whom would bestow enormous glory and fame upon him, is the clearest evidence of this trait in his character, and is cited as such by Prays-desire (*ibid.*). The two meanings are present in the same narrative, but they do not collapse into one: Arthur seeks the Faery Queen, *and* he desires

the glory that winning her would bestow on him. What the commentary adds to the poem is that the one fact *signifies* the other.

This way of applying Spenser's commentary on the action of the poem to the same imaginary world in which the action takes place makes The Faerie Queene a symbolic allegory, that is, an allegory in which text and commentary coexist in a single imaginary world. But such symbolic readings of the action are not always satisfactory, for frequently the commentaries that critics read back into the action of the poem cannot really be made to accord with the action as it is presented by the text. For example, A. C. Hamilton suggests that when Florimell flees from the Witch's monster, "The tearing and loss of her 'broken girdle' (III.viii.2) is the loss of her maidenhead".[23] To the text which says that Florimell loses her girdle, in other words, Hamilton attaches the commentary, 'Florimell is raped'. But Florimell is not raped, either at this or at any other time in the story. Hamilton's commentary is comprehensible only under the assumption that Florimell herself somehow takes part in two very different stories: one, the story told by the poem, in which what she flees is a monster that intends to eat her, and in which what she suffers is the loss of a piece of clothing; the second, the story told by Hamilton, in which what she flees is someone who intends to rape her, and who

succeeds in doing so. To keep these two stories separate we would need to apply to Florimell the same kind of distinction as that which Fowler makes between the Arthur who dreams the action of the poem and the "fictive self" who takes part in the action. But even this explanation is not remotely satisfactory: for if Florimell's loss of her girdle in the imaginary world which the poem presents to us means that, in some other imaginary world, Florimell is raped, then to what, in this other world, could Spenser's subsequent description of Florimell as a "virgin" (III.viii.42) possibly refer?

The problem here, I hasten to add, is not simply with Hamilton; it is not simply that he, in particular, has a peculiarly piecemeal and incoherent way of interpreting the poem as allegory. On the contrary, it would appear that anyone will inevitably produce reams of comparable absurdities who follows a general strategy of interpreting the action of <u>The Faerie Queene</u> in either of the ways in which Spenser himself may be construed as interpreting Arthur's quest for Gloriana and Archimago's parting of the Redcrosse knight from Una. For example, to take only the first of almost innumerable instances, in the poem's opening canto, the Redcrosse knight defeats a monster called Errour. Following Spenser's example in the second canto, we could take this to mean that the knight overcomes error itself. But if this is what the episode 'means', then how can we make sense of the fact

that Redcrosse is anything but free from error in his subsequent actions?[24] As with Hamilton's interpretation of Florimell's loss of her girdle, the question is equally unanswerable regardless of whether we postulate two knights, one the dream-persona of the other, or only one, to whom both text and commentary refer. In fact, this obvious commentary on the poem's opening episode so manifestly fails to correspond either to how the knight fares, or to any commentary which might readily be attached to how he fares, in subsequent episodes, that the very failure of correspondence might itself be thought to be the point: that the ability to defeat personifications of vice in open battle, like a character in Prudentius' Psychomachia, is insufficient qualification for virtue in a world structured by Spenser's more complex allegory.[25]

It appears, then, that none of the ways in which critics have attempted to make sense of the Letter to Raleigh as a prescription for reading The Faerie Queene is fully satisfactory in practice, for every attempt to find in the Letter a consistent set of rules for reading the poem is frustrated by specific instances, whether in the Letter itself or in the body of the poem, where the proposed rules prove inadequate in accounting for the allegorical reading which the specific passage demands.[26] It may be added that, even where a critic does manage to write an extended commentary on the poem which is

self-consistent and in accord with a reasonably sensitive interpretation of Letter to Raleigh, this commentary is liable to seem, to many other readers, deeply unsatisfactory, and not merely in its specific details, but in its very essence, that is, with respect to the very notion that any such commentary could be a satisfactory account of what the episode 'means'. For example, Hankins offers a reading of the episode in which Britomart visits the house of Malecasta which is coherent in itself and in accord with his understanding that the Letter proposes two separate types of allegory, operating separately in the poem. According to him, this story is an example of "internal allegory"; in it, accordingly, Britomart is to be interpreted not as a person but as a personification of the chastity which an unspecified woman is struggling to retain. "When Britomart suddenly awakes, seizes her sword, and causes a great uproar", he suggests, "that is probably the moment when the lady slaps the gentleman's face."[27] The objection that many readers would have to such an interpretation of the story is not simply that they might prefer to attach a commentary to the episode which differs somewhat from Hankins's in its details, but that *any* such commentary seems completely to bury the really interesting story, the story which is actually told by the poem, under another, less interesting story made up by the commentator. The more extensively critics append

commentaries of this sort to the poem, the more certain it becomes that the poem itself will begin to be seen to be disappearing beneath the masses of stories which have been appended to it, provoking a backlash among critics designed to strip these superfluous accretions away.

Such a reaction, of course, soon faces its own problems, for as its proponents remove from the poem what they see as the specious commentaries which have come to encumber it and to interfere with its appreciation in its own right, they inevitably find themselves confronted again with Spenser's indications, especially in the Letter to Raleigh, that some such systematic commentary on the poem is called for. Whether it is Edwin Greenlaw or A. C. Hamilton reacting against the sort of reading typical of F. M. Padelford and Lilian Winstanley and the other critics anthologized in the Variorum edition of Spenser's works, or Jan Karel Kouwenhoven reacting against the sort of reading common in Hamilton and his contemporaries, the pattern is the same, of writing polemic on one hand against the kind of additions to the poem which they themselves offer on the other.[28]

To me, it seems that there is only one way off the horns of this dilemma, namely to stop trying to find that ideal commentary for the poem which will render it coherent without burdening it with the accretions of stories that Spenser did not tell and ideas that he did not propound, and to observe instead, as precisely as we

can, how the poem provokes commentary upon itself, and how the commentaries which it provokes supervene upon the poem which provokes them. From this point of view, the Letter to Raleigh has a place of special importance, not, as has usually been assumed, because it is a guide, either good or bad, to what the poem means, or because it is an authoritative prescription for writing a commentary on the poem, but simply because it has exerted a more general influence upon the poem's interpretation than any other piece of self-commentary which Spenser wrote, provoking responses to the poem, and methods for responding to the poem, different from any that would have been, had the Letter never been written.

We may consider, for example, the history of critical interpretations of the episode wherein Florimell is pursued by a succession of male characters, beginning with "a griesly Foster.../ Breathing out beastly lust her to defile" (III.i.17), but soon including Prince Arthur, who "Her selfe pursewd, in hope to win thereby/ Most goodly meede, the fairest Dame aliue" (III.i.18). There have been, in general, two very different sorts of conclusion made with respect to the question whether it is a virtuous action on Arthur's part thus to "follow beauties chace" (III.i.19). Now, all critics, so far as I can see, have agreed that the answer must be 'yes' in at least in one respect, in that one of Arthur's motives in joining the pursuit of Florimell is to remove the

threat posed to her by the "foster" -- as the poem puts it, "To reskew her from shame, and to reuenge her wrong" (III.iv.45). But a disagreement springs from the fact that this is not Arthur's *only* motive. It is clear from the beginning that he wishes also to catch Florimell for his own sake (III.i.18); and when, at a fork in the road, the foster goes one way and Florimell another, the two motives are disentangled: it is, thereafter, "That Ladies loue" which Arthur unambiguously pursues, in hope "to win so goodly pray" for himself (III.iv.46-7). So the rescue motive, while commendable, can in effect be left aside, and the real question concerning the morality of Arthur's action restated more specifically as follows: is Arthur's desire for Florimell virtuous?

The traditional answer to this more specific question is also 'yes'. Arthur's desire for Florimell, it is argued, is virtuous because it is the Platonic love of that "true beauty" which "has its source in a beautiful soul", and which "arouses noble desires in noble minds", including, of course, Arthur's.[29] The corollary to this traditional conclusion is that Florimell is mistaken to fear Arthur and to continue fleeing from him: it is only "because of her fright" that "she is unable to recognize [his] noble intent".[30] This interpretation continues to receive support from most of the critics who have written on the episode in recent decades.[31] There are, however, some dissenters, who suggest that Arthur's desire, and

his continued pursuit of Florimell after "Timias has long since diverted the forester", demonstrate a lapse from virtue, not only because the episode shows him unfaithful in his love for the Faery Queen, but also because his desire for Florimell itself seems to contain "a trace of the predatory".[32] From this perspective, Florimell's response to Arthur's pursuit might be thought somewhat more sound. It seems, then, that some account is needed of how commentary on this episode can have gone in two such different directions.

Before attempting to provide such an account, however, it will be worth noting that a third, or compromise interpretation is also possible, based upon the distinction which some critics have made between the Arthur who contains the poem's action (the 'dreamer') and the Arthur who participates in it (the 'dream-persona'). With this distinction in place, it can be argued that while the desire of the dreamer is always exemplary, the behaviour of the dream-persona, interpreted literally, may not be.[33] But in practice, this 'compromise' is no more than a variation on the traditional assessment which makes Arthur an exemplar of virtuous, Platonic love. For just as in the modern interpretation of dreams the occasional immorality of the dream-persona is treated only as a characteristic of the dreaming state and is neither censured in itself nor attributed literally to the dreamer, so in the two-tiered approach to the

character of Arthur the moral failings of the Arthur who appears in the action are mentioned only in demonstrating his non-identity with the exemplary knight described by the Letter to Raleigh, and the real moral assessment of Arthur, made with respect to the exemplary figure, is entirely favourable: Arthur's desire, it is asserted, is not a problematic yearning for Florimell herself, but the noble yearning "for the heavenly beauty" which Florimell represents.[34]

There are, then, essentially two different directions in which commentary on this episode has gone. According to one, Arthur's pursuit of Florimell either exemplifies, itself, the action of the noble Platonic lover, or else represents the desire of such a lover in the manner of a dream. According to the other, Arthur's pursuit of Florimell demonstrates his capacity for inconstancy and for "a trace of the predatory". An examination of the various commentaries which have taken either of these two points of view shows that the conclusion reached by a commentator depends, at bottom, on whether the poem is interpreted through the filter of the Letter to Raleigh. The traditional interpretation grows out of the assumptions that the Letter is authoritative in telling us that Arthur is a character of exemplary virtue, and that, consequently, anything which the poem says about the virtuous in general can safely be taken to apply to Arthur. Such an approach soon arrives at the conclusion

that Arthur, pursuing Florimell, exemplifies the "braue sprite" in whom love "kindles goodly fire", as opposed to the forester, who exemplifies "the baser wit" whom "It stirreth vp to sensuall desire" (III.v.1). Nowhere in the poem, however, does Spenser tell us that Arthur's pursuit of Florimell exemplifies such virtuous desire. (His desire for Gloriana is clearly identified with the virtuous love of the "braue sprite", (III.v.2), but that is quite another matter). Only if we assume from the beginning that everything which Arthur does either is virtuous in itself or represents something virtuous does such a distinction clearly present itself between the respective meanings of Arthur's and the forester's involvement in "beauties chace". A contrary perspective which, in spite of the Letter's claims, does not assume *a priori* that all of Arthur's actions must be entirely virtuous, soon finds evidence in the poem which suggests that he is less than morally exemplary in desiring and pursuing Florimell. The pursuit begins with the strong implication that Arthur and Guyon, pursuing Florimell "in hope to win thereby/ ...the fairest Dame aliue", share a common goal with the "griesly Foster", from whom they mean, certainly, "To reskew her", but of whom, at the same time, they are "Full of great enuie and fell gealosy" (III.i.17-8). Lest this implication be lost on us, the narrator returns our attention straight away to Britomart, "whose constant mind/ Would not so lightly

follow beauties chace" (III.i.19), seeming to imply, thereby, the inconstancy of the knights who have behaved otherwise. By comparison with Britomart, the exemplar of chaste love, Arthur looks like less than the 'perfect' knight which the Letter to Raleigh promises, at least in respect of this one virtue.[35]

A proponent of the traditional point of view on this episode might argue that a reading of the poem which finds Arthur in any respect blameworthy ignores the prescriptions for interpreting the poem laid down by the Letter to Raleigh. A comparable objection could be made, however, with respect to the traditional reading itself, namely that there are significant aspects of what Spenser wrote which the traditionalists, in turn, must ignore, in order to establish the coherency of their reading of the poem. One of these I have already mentioned: the traditional reader must overlook the criticism of Arthur and Guyon implicit in the narrator's praise of Britomart for abstaining from the chase. But the matter does not end here; the interpretation of Arthur's pursuit of Florimell as a virtuous expression of virtuous love has ramifications which spread like ripples through the more general interpretation of the poem. As I noted earlier, the corollary to the virtuousness of Arthur's chase is that Florimell is mistaken to fear him and to continue fleeing from him. Accordingly, the apparent fact that "all she does is to experience terror" is to be

attributed not to the character of the world she encounters -- for even if in some instances her terror is "well-grounded", at other times it is "groundless" -- but rather to her own propensity for reacting to every situation in the same way: "always terror, always gallop gallop gallop away".[36] Her defining characteristic, one might actually conclude, is her "being unable to interpret the world", her being "(as we say) 'all at sea'."[37] But surely this is far too slight an assessment of the character who quite rightly judges, while the reader still has no reason to suspect that Proteus represents anything but heaven-sent "succour... to her distressed cace" (III.viii.29), that she is "not saued yet from daunger dred/ ...but chaung'd from one to other feare" (III.viii.33). And if, in this case, Florimell turns out to be a better judge than the first-time reader in perceiving that the figure whom the narrator has introduced as her rescuer will turn out to be no more than another would-be predator upon her chastity, can we really, with perfect confidence in our judgement, refer to Arthur, whom she likewise fears, as "a knight, who (as we know) meant her nothing but good -- who was, in fact, the Rescuer *par excellence*"?[38] On the contrary, it seems that she flees from him not because she confuses him with the forester (III.iv.50), and not because she mistakes his intentions, but precisely because "he her followd still with courage keene" (III.iv.51) -- "courage" being

used here quite unambiguously in a libidinous sense, as with the "courage" of the old fisherman who later tries to rape her (III.viii.23). If "fast she from him fled, no lesse affrayd,/ Then of wilde beastes if she had chased beene" (III.iv.51), then what is this but the appropriate response to a pursuer who aims "to win" her as his "goodly pray" (III.iv.46)? There is, indeed, "a trace of the predatory" about Arthur, and Florimell's fear of him seems to be, not "groundless", not evidence of an inability to interpret the world, but rather of a sensitivity to this aspect of his character. And even if, in spite of this trait, Arthur is in all other respects "the Rescuer *par excellence*", what of this? If every would-be rescuer is intent on claiming the one he rescues as the reward for his pains -- and we are told clearly enough that Arthur is to be included, along with Proteus, in this category -- then the very idea of the rescuer is suspect in an erotic context. In this respect, I would dare to go farther even than those critics who have previously found Arthur's desire for Florimell less than virtuous: where they have allowed that Arthur remains virtuous at least in respect of his more noble intention to rescue her from the forester, I ask whether it is not precisely the motive of the rescuer, as rescuer, which comes increasingly under suspicion in the course of Book Three and "beauties chace". If so, it is from Florimell's perspective on the

world that this important issue is raised. Far from "being unable to interpret the world", she is an important observer of it. It is true, perhaps, that she sees every pursuer in essentially the same terms, and that accordingly, "all she does is to experience terror"; but if, for a moment, we take her point of view seriously, we begin to see the world in which she lives in a compelling new way:

> When Florimell flees one ravisher only to be nearly caught by another, or when successive lustful monsters behave with nightmarish similarity, we dimly sense some terrible elemental agent capable of infinite metamorphosis and more real than the overtly discrete episodes. The possibility of a comprehensive diabolical referent haunts the text.[39]

Comprehensive enough, I would argue, to implicate even the knight of magnificence. But such an interpretation of the poem cannot fully emerge so long as the assumption prevails that the Letter to Raleigh is essentially authoritative in declaring Arthur to be a character of exemplary virtue.

In saying that, if the Letter to Raleigh had not come down to us along with The Faerie Queene, our interpretation of the poem would have been quite different, I am not arguing that we should turn our backs entirely on the Letter to Raleigh, as if it were nothing but an interference in the proper work of understanding the poem. On the contrary, the Letter is as much a part

of the Spenserian allegory which we are exploring as is the poem itself. What is more, a move to reject the Letter because what it tells us about the poem jars in many significant ways with what the poem tells us about itself would be self-defeating, because, as we shall see, the problematic relationship between the Letter to Raleigh and The Faerie Queene is no more than an intimation of the problematic relationship that The Faerie Queene has with itself. A policy of rejecting any commentary which clashes with the text upon which it comments would swiftly destroy the very fabric of the poem.[40] But while we should not reject the Letter, neither should we privilege it unduly, simply because of its general scope and its claim to reveal the poet's method. We need to see the Letter as just one layer within the complex of texts and commentaries which generate the Spenserian allegory, and to observe not only its influence upon the poem's interpretation, but also what the poem would have been apart from this influence.

In this spirit, there is another aspect of what the Letter to Raleigh says about the poem whose influence on criticism we need to understand.

(2.2) Spenser's "Particular Purposes"

By comparison with the Letter to Raleigh's account of Spenser's "general intention" in The Faerie Queene, the

treatment there of his "particular purposes" is somewhat cursory:

> In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe...

But this latter account, however brief and parenthetical, has been no less influential as a prescription for interpreting the poem than the former, in large part because it has seemed to be closely related to certain other apparently authorial instructions for understanding the poem, which appear in some of Spenser's dedicatory sonnets as well as within the poem itself, principally in the proems to the various books.

Several of the dedicatory sonnets flatter their addressees that they may find themselves represented in the poem -- though perhaps only, as the Earl of Oxford is told, "Vnder a shady vele".[41] Such indications, if taken seriously, can be seen as developing the Letter to Raleigh's apparent indication that the 'shadowing' of Elizabeth in the characters Gloriana and Belphoebe is just one of Spenser's various "particular purposes" in the poem, in which case the figurative use of Gloriana and Belphoebe to refer to Elizabeth takes on the

appearance of an exemplary instance of a kind of topical allegory. Over the centuries, there has been no lack of commentators who have understood themselves to have been invited, on this basis, to interpret various other characters in the poem as likenesses of major personages in Elizabethan politics, although, of course, debate has accompanied the project as to which character represents whom, and for how many of the poem's characters such topical analogues may be found; however, criticism of this sort of procedure by Edwin Greenlaw and, more recently, by A. C. Hamilton and others, has made apparent to most contemporary Spenserians the extent to which detailed readings of the poem as topical allegory must always be arbitrary constructions based on the ingeniousness of commentators rather than on meaning objectively present in the text, and, moreover, the extent to which, at their worst, such readings tend to attribute to Spenser a more detailed knowledge of Elizabethan politicking than he is likely to have had.[42]

A more persistent influence on The Faerie Queene's commentators has been the account, in the Letter to Raleigh and in the proems to the various books, of *how* the poem functions as an allegory, as opposed to the question of *what* specific figurative meanings it bears. Before we examine this influence, however, it will be necessary to say something about the relationship between the "I" who speaks in the Letter to Raleigh and the "I"

who speaks in the proems. Now, clearly enough, both of these voices are ostensibly the poet's own, and both claim an authoritative knowledge of the poem's workings. What is more, the impression that they are, in some sense, two expressions of the 'same' voice, is bolstered by the extent to which (as we shall see) they agree in their description of how the poem works as an allegory. Finally, it is clear, I think, that the voice of the proems and the voice of the Letter to Raleigh are produced by Spenser under similar pressures: for the prominence, within the work, of both the proems and the Letter is such that they, more than most other parts of the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene, must have been expected to assume the burden of the task of claiming favourable attention from those who might reward the poet for his efforts, as well as the burden of the task of deflecting potentially hostile responses.[43] These similar pressures under which Spenser produces the voices that speak in these different places suggests that we should look for a similar distinction in each instance between the ostensible author who appears in the text and the real author who tactfully constructs these personae for himself. But in order to do this, we shall need to bring into alignment two different sets of critical vocabulary: for while various critics have questioned the reliability of the Letter to Raleigh on one hand and of the "I" within the poem on the other, the former

problem has been treated largely as a question of *accuracy* (that is, the accuracy of one text in describing another), while the latter has been treated largely as a question of *irony* (that is, irony in, or at the expense of, a narratorial voice).[44] But in fact, the problem of the accuracy of the Letter to Raleigh and the problem of the reliability of The Faerie Queene's narrator are analogous if not ultimately identical; for in each case the important issues are, first, the extent to which an ostensibly authorial voice is correct in its ostensibly authoritative description of the workings of the poem, and second, the extent to which the ostensible authority of this voice has functioned prescriptively in shaping interpretations of the poem.

The 'author' of the Letter to Raleigh and the 'author' of the proems are essentially at one in their descriptions of the poem's relation to Queen Elizabeth. Just as the former asserts that Elizabeth is represented in the character Gloriana, "and her kingdom in Faery land", so the latter tells Elizabeth that

> ...thou, O fairest Princesse vnder sky,
> In this faire mirrhour maist behold thy face,
> And thine owne realmes in lond of Faery...
> (II.Pr.4).

And just as the Letter to Raleigh claims that Elizabeth is in some places 'shadowed' in the character of Gloriana and in other places in the character of Belphoebe, so one

of the proems humbly requests of the queen that she not

> ...refuse,
> In mirrours more then one her selfe to see,
> But either *Gloriana* let her chuse,
> Or in *Belphoebe* fashioned to bee...
> (III.Pr.5).

A comparison of the Letter to Raleigh with the proems gives the impression of a single author expressing the same ideas with different degrees of deference to readers of different ranks. Because the ideas themselves are effectively the same in both cases, it would be easy to suppose that they can be extracted from the different attitudes of subservience which are required for presenting them to different audiences, and attributed straightforwardly to the poet himself who lurks behind his various humble personae. But in fact, as I hope to show, these ideas themselves form part of an elaborate compliment which the poem pays to the queen, and not only they but the authorial persona who espouses them are shaped entirely by this purpose; and while it is essential for the purposes of this compliment that they be taken as describing accurately the poem's workings as an allegory, they nevertheless, considered in themselves, have no descriptive power whatever as an account of how, in general, the allegory of the poem works (although, as we shall see, they can have a significant *prescriptive* power over the allegorical interpretation of the poem, if they are treated as authoritative guides to its meaning.)

Like the Letter to Raleigh's account of the "general intention and meaning" of the poem, these indications of the author's "particular purposes" should not be omitted entirely from a description of the poem's workings as an allegory, because they themselves, as internal commentaries on the imagery of the poem, form part of the allegory that they claim to describe; but neither should they be accorded a special authority over other instances of the poem's self-commentary, simply because of their claim -- which is ultimately a false one -- to reveal the basic structure of the poem.

The elaborate compliment to the queen to which I have referred is alluded to by C. S. Lewis, when he writes that "We should not say 'To appreciate Belphoebe we must think about Elizabeth I'; but rather 'To understand the ritual compliment Spenser is paying Elizabeth, we must study Belphoebe.'"[45] This, I take it, is as much as to say that Belphoebe and Gloriana are not *really* copies of Elizabeth, but are rather assemblages of conventional qualities of virtue and beauty which are then attributed to Elizabeth -- and in an even more exalted degree -- regardless of the extent to which she might genuinely have possessed these qualities herself. Building on Lewis's observation, we might argue that the very description of these characters as portraits or shadows or mirror images of the queen, in the Letter to Raleigh and the proems to the various books, is a part of this

"ritual compliment", which consists not only in asserting that the resplendent characters Belphoebe and Gloriana *signify* Queen Elizabeth (an assertion which, in itself, would be unproblematic with respect to the present discussion, in that it says nothing about *how* the allegory works), but in describing these fictional characters specifically as copies (or what Plato, and the Platonic tradition generally, would call '*eikones*') of the queen whom they signify, and then in invoking various commonplaces of Platonic philosophy to establish the superiority of Elizabeth to these copies (II.Pr.5), and indeed, to all possible fictional representations (III.Pr.1-3).

Another, perhaps more precise way of putting the point that Belphoebe and Gloriana are not *really* copies of Elizabeth would be to say that these characters are not copies of the *real* Elizabeth, but rather of a fictional "Goddesse heauenly bright" (I.Pr.4) who does actually possess their exemplary qualities in an even higher degree than themselves, and who is then flatteringly *supposed* to be Elizabeth. Now, it is has been justly observed, by Louis Adrian Montrose and by David Lee Miller, that such an imaginary, semi-divine Elizabeth is not Spenser's personal invention, but is rather a fiction collectively created and (at least officially) collectively believed in by loyal Elizabethans.[46] On this basis -- that "Elizabeth...

herself was already, as monarch, a kind of historical fiction" -- Miller apparently would have us again take seriously the notion, purveyed by the proems and the Letter to Raleigh, that the characters Gloriana and Belphoebe who appear within the poem are copies of the 'real' Queen Elizabeth: that is, of the figure who, although she is "a kind of... fiction", is nevertheless effectively *outside* the poem, in the *collective* imaginary space of ideology.[47] But, I think, such an analysis of the poem's relation to the public myth of Elizabeth misses something important, namely that even if the "Goddesse heauenly bright" of the proems and the Letter to Raleigh is merely a version of a collectively maintained fiction, Spenser's *version* of the fiction is a part of the imaginary world presented by the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene, and to this extent is unavoidably 'inside' the poem.[48] In particular, the relationships that Spenser's imaginary Queen Elizabeth has with other things in the imaginary world presented by The Faerie Queene distinguish his version of that fiction from any other rendering of the myth to which, as a "ritual compliment", it dutifully contributes. Principal among these imaginary relationships are the channels of inspiration and imitation which link the "Goddesse heauenly bright" on one hand to the imaginary "I" of the proems who is the ostensible author of The Faerie Queene, and on the other hand to the imaginary poem which she

inspires this imaginary poet to write.[49]

I repeat: the *imaginary* poem which she inspires this imaginary poet to write. Although, as critics, we now habitually distinguish between the "I" or 'narrator' who is presented as the author of The Faerie Queene and the real author who "may be separated from" this persona "by large ironies"[50], and although we may similarly distinguish between the fictional "Goddesse" Elizabeth who appears in the proems and the entirely human Elizabeth to whom this and many other, similar fictions were ritually addressed, in general we have not yet similarly distinguished between 'the poem' as fictionally represented in the poem, and the poem in which it is represented -- even though this distinction is just as real and just as significant as those others.

To help us understand the practical significance of this distinction, let us consider another, similar compliment to Elizabeth which appears elsewhere in The Faerie Queene. In the main narrative portion of Book II, Arthur, having rescued Guyon from Pyrochles and Cymochles and returned to him his shield, asks his new companion "why on your shield so goodly scored/ Beare ye the picture of that Ladies head?" -- observing, as he does so, that "Full liuely is the semblaunt, though the substance dead" (II.ix.2). Guyon replies:

> Faire Sir... if in that picture dead
> Such life ye read, and vertue in vaine shew,

> What mote ye weene, if the trew liuely-head
> Of that most glorious visage ye did vew?
> (II.ix.3).

The "picture", of course, is of "the mighty Queene of *Faerie*" (II.ix.4) whom Arthur is seeking, and as an *eikon* of the Faery Queen, can be used by him in the way that the Socrates of the Republic advised his interlocutors to use the sun, namely, as a means toward apprehending the nature of the original whose likeness it bears. But just as, in some respects, the sun and the visible things in general were, for Socrates, potentially deceptive and even "ludicrous" representatives of their originals, because the qualities of the visible world which were to be likened to the qualities of the intelligible order -- visibility, directionality, and so on -- were the very opposites of the qualities which actually belonged to the invisible and non-spatial intelligible order (see Introduction (1): pp. 32-4), so, Guyon warns Arthur, the likeness of the picture which he bears on his shield to its original has to be understood as no better than the likeness that the dead can bear to the living. Indeed, the Platonism of the passage extends somewhat further, for just as the picture on Guyon's shield can be used by Arthur as a symbol to call to mind its original, so the bodily beauty which the picture represents can be used in turn as a symbol of its own original, the beauty of her soul, "Thousand times fairer then her mortall hew"

(II.ix.3).[51] Potentially, the chain of symbolism passes upward still further, beyond Gloriana to the God who made her, as Guyon explains to Medina:

> In her the richesse of all heauenly grace
> In chiefe degree are heaped vp on hye...
> That men beholding so great excellence,
> And rare perfection in mortalitie,
> Do her adore with sacred reuerence,
> As th'Idole of her makers great magnificence.
> (II.ii.41).

Indeed, not only is Gloriana described, like Plato's sun, as an *eikon* of the very Creator, but in being depicted as such she comes to resemble the sun itself, so that "As morning Sunne her beames dispredden cleare" (II.ii.40) and thereby "her light the earth enlumines cleare" (II.ix.4). Generously sending forth her pictures and "her prayses" (II.ix.4) throughout the world in such a way as to draw the virtuous into the chain of symbols that leads upward through her to God, Gloriana is like one of those members of the Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy who, having themselves "received... [the] divine splendour... then pass on the light... to beings further down the scale" (Celestial Hierarchy III.2 -- see Introduction (1): p. 53).

We will have no difficulty in identifying the context in which Arthur attempts to gain an appreciation of the Faery Queen through her picture on a shield as an imaginary world, or in distinguishing the imaginary author, within this world, of the picture on the shield (it was painted by an artist who saw Gloriana directly)

from its actual author insofar as it is a literary image (namely Spenser). Within the imaginary world presented by the poem, the picture on Guyon's shield is created as an *eikon* of Gloriana, and so can be used by Arthur, who inhabits this world, as a symbol for her: the former process makes possible the latter. But from our point of view outside the imaginary world presented by the narrative, the process is in a certain sense reversed: for us, the exchange in which Arthur praises the picture on Guyon's shield and Guyon dispraises the picture in relation to the original is a part of what *creates* the character of the Faery Queen in the first place. In other words, we do not suppose that, somewhere 'behind' the narrative 'surface' of the poem, there must first be a Faery Queen in order to make possible the painting on Guyon's shield and his various verbal descriptions which portray her in her absence; rather, any such character whose existence we infer and whose qualities we gather in spite of her not appearing personally in the narrative exists only insofar as the narrative constructs her as absent.

So constituted, the character of Gloriana herself is used in constructing Spenser's version of the imaginary character of Queen Elizabeth. As we have seen, Gloriana is described in the proems to Books Two and Three as a mirror image of Elizabeth, and in the Letter to Raleigh as her "shadow". In another passage from the proem to

the third book, the Faery Queen is described as yet another kind of *eikon*, a painted portrait:

> ...O dred Soueraine
> Thus farre forth pardon, sith that choicest wit
> Cannot your glorious pourtraict figure plaine
> That I in colourd showes may shadow it...
> (III.Pr.3).

These various images -- reflection, shadow, portrait -- are effectively interchangeable, as is shown by the way in which they are used in close proximity to one another. (For example, in the proem to Book III, we are offered painted images in the third stanza and mirror images in the fifth.) What remains constant throughout these various accounts is that in each case Gloriana is described as the derivative image or *eikon* of Elizabeth. Furthermore, it is asserted that this *eikon* can be used in precisely the way that Arthur uses the *eikon* of Gloriana on Guyon's shield, namely, as a means toward apprehending the nature of the original whose likeness it bears. Just as, in some respects, the picture on Guyon's shield inevitably falls short of the object which it is intended to represent, even by so much as the "dead" fall short of "life" (II.ix.3), so Gloriana is described as inevitably falling short of her original, whose true character not even the greatest artists in history could have captured fully in an artistic representation (III.Pr.2-3). But while this shortfall is presented apologetically to Queen Elizabeth herself, it is also

presented as having its benefits for more humble readers; for thanks to that shortfall,

> ...feeble eyes your glory may behold,
> Which else could not endure those beames bright,
> But would be dazled with exceeding light.
> (II.Pr.5).

In other words, just as, for Arthur, the portrait of Gloriana on Guyon's shield is useful in spite of its shortcomings because it allows him a partial apprehension of what he otherwise would not see at all, so for those with more "feeble eyes" than Elizabeth herself, the queen's poetic *eikones* are indirect means of looking upon what they could never look upon directly.

This description of the relation between Gloriana and Elizabeth is at least as indebted to the broad Platonic tradition of Spenser's time as is the similar description of the relation between Gloriana and her portrait on Guyon's shield.[52] For example, the treatment of *eikones* as useful in respect of their very inadequacy (in that their shortcomings make them suitable to the perceptive powers of lower orders) is a commonplace of the Platonic tradition: it is, for instance, an important feature of Pseudo-Dionysius' system (see Introduction (1): p. 51); and indeed, the idea is very nearly spelled out by Plato himself, for in the Republic, the very reflected images which at one point are said to fall short of capturing the full reality of what they reflect (596d8-e4)

elsewhere are useful in providing a partial knowledge of their originals for those whose eyes are not yet strong enough to look upon the originals directly (516a5-8). For Plato, such mediated knowledge by means of *eikones* is exemplified by the allegorical method through which Socrates acquaints his interlocutors with the Form of the Good (see Introduction (1): pp. 34, 49); likewise in The Faerie Queene, it is the figures allegorically associated with the queen who are described as her *eikones* and presented as means by which her subjects may gain a partial appreciation of her "glory".

Of course, it is not literally true that the sight of Queen Elizabeth was too glorious for ordinary eyes to bear. The complimentary fiction which we are discussing appeals to Platonism not only in setting Elizabeth above her depictions in art, but also in setting her above the ordinary power of the senses to perceive. It creates a fictional figure less akin to the real queen than to the sun which, in Plato's allegory of the cave, the released prisoners cannot look upon directly. Another passage which attributes this sunlike quality to the fictional Elizabeth is found in the proem to Book One, where the 'author' petitions her as follows:

> ...O Goddesse heauenly bright,
> Mirrour of grace and Maiestie diuine,
> Great Lady of the greatest Isle, whose light
> Like *Phoebus* lampe throughout the world doth shine,
> Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne...
> (I.Pr.4).

Indeed, as not only sunlike herself, but also a "Mirrour" of a yet higher "Maiestie", Elizabeth is portrayed like one of those members of the divinely sanctioned hierarchy whom Pseudo-Dionysius described as "clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of... God himself", who once they have "received this... divine splendour... then pass on this light... to beings further down the scale" of being (Celestial Hierarchy III.2 -- see Introduction (1): p. 53). In the queen's case, the "beings further down the scale" include the 'author' of the proems and his projected readers, other subjects of this sunlike queen. This description will be reiterated in the 1596 edition of The Faerie Queene, where, in the proem to the sixth book, she will again be described as "a mirrour sheene", reflecting "brightnesse" into "The eyes of all" her subordinates (VI.Pr.6).

Let us now directly compare the presentation of Elizabeth as the sunlike original of Gloriana to the presentation of Gloriana as the sunlike original of her portrait on Guyon's shield. It was clear enough, in our earlier case, that the entire situation and all the people and objects that played significant roles in it -- Arthur, Guyon, Gloriana, and the shield -- were parts of the imaginary world presented by The Faerie Queene, and that, therefore, imagining how such a shield came into existence *within* this world (for example, supposing

that Gloriana gave a sitting so that an artist could paint it) was entirely different from describing its origin as a poetic image (that is, through the language of Spenser's poem). But in this second case, the distinction between the imaginary process of authorship *within* the imaginary world, and the real process which *creates* that imaginary world, is more difficult to make. For the imaginary people and objects which correspond, in this case, to Arthur, Guyon, Gloriana, and the shield -- namely 'the reader', 'the author', 'Queen Elizabeth', and 'the poem' -- masquerade under precisely the names of those people and objects outside the poem's imaginary world who are involved in the real process through which the imaginary world is created, and in the case of 'the poem', under the name of the very linguistic device which presents that imaginary world -- the very thing, that is, whose 'inside' *is* the imaginary world in question, and whose 'outside' is the world of extra-textual reality. To maintain clearly, in our thought, the distinction between (on one hand) the imaginary relations among 'reader', 'author', 'queen', and 'poem', and (on the other hand) the real relations among the reader, author, queen, and poem, can be difficult, to say the least; but it is also, I have found, ultimately rewarding for the purposes of appreciating how the real poem actually works. To show what I mean by this, I offer two observations:

First -- no one, I think, would ever have supposed, solely because Arthur's ability to use the picture on Guyon's shield as a symbol of Gloriana depends on that picture being, in the first place, a kind of quasi-Platonic *eikon* of the Faery Queen, that the *whole* allegorical functioning of The Faerie Queene must depend on the allegory's existing in the context of something like the Platonic metaphysics; for Arthur's use of this shield as a symbol of its original is just one among practically innumerable examples of figurative use of imagery within the poem, and by no means typical of them all. But although, in the final analysis, the imaginary use of Gloriana by those readers with "feeble eyes" as a symbolic means of apprehending a "Goddesse heauenly bright" whose sight they otherwise "could not endure" is similarly no more than one of the multitude of figurative uses of imagery by characters within the poem, it is far more difficult to set aside the notion that *this* quasi-Platonic use of an *eikon* must have something to tell us about how the allegory of The Faerie Queene functions *in general*; for in this latter case, it is an imaginary version of the allegorical poem itself, rather than merely an imaginary shield, which is described as a link in a Neoplatonic chain of iconic symbols, and it is an imaginary version of the poem's reader, rather than an imaginary prince, who is supposed to be able to enter this upward-leading chain of *eikones* by reading that

object figuratively.

Second -- within the imaginary world presented by the poem, Gloriana and Belphoebe are created as *eikones* of Elizabeth, and so can be used by the reader who inhabits this world as symbols for her: the former process makes possible the latter. From *our* point of view outside the imaginary world presented by the narrative, however, the process is in a certain sense reversed. For us, it is the imaginary author's (and other characters') on one hand praising Gloriana and Belphoebe in their own right, and on the other hand dispraising them insofar as they are mere poetic representations of something imagined as being outside the poem, which in large part *creates* the imaginary character of Queen Elizabeth, and her imaginary extra-poetic location, in the first place. We do not need to suppose that the quasi-Platonic metaphysics according to which Gloriana and Belphoebe are *eikones* of Elizabeth must in some sense pre-exist and make possible the figurative use of Gloriana and Belphoebe as symbols of Elizabeth; on the contrary, the Platonic character of the imaginary world in which these relations exist takes shape only through the presence of these figurative relations which are specified as symbolic and iconic.

These two points -- first, that 'the poem' which is described as a link in a chain of Neoplatonic *eikones* is just one among the multitude of imaginary objects presented by <u>The Faerie Queene</u>, not <u>The Faerie Queene</u>

itself; and second, that it is specific figurative relations within the imaginary world presented by The Faerie Queene which account for the Platonic structure of this world, rather than, conversely, the Platonic structure of this world which makes possible the presence of figurative relations in it -- are of particularly great importance for current criticism of The Faerie Queene, because the venerable tradition which justifies reading poems allegorically on the basis of assigning poetry a place in a universe of *eikones* (see Introduction (1): pp. 47*ff*), and upon which Spenser draws in describing his poem as allegorical insofar as it is a bearer of *eikones*, has enjoyed a certain revival in popularity in recent decades, particularly among Spenser critics. Thus, for example, Thomas Roche writes that "Allegorical reading (or more simply allegory) is a form of literary criticism with a metaphysical basis", a basis which he proceeds to explain with reference to Pseudo-Dionysius and to the Renaissance Neoplatonist Pico della Mirandola.[53] In a similar vein, Isabel MacCaffrey writes that all allegory assumes "an 'objectively' valid relationship between material and transcendent being".[54] More recently, David Lee Miller, citing MacCaffrey's precedent, argues that to understand the allegorical workings of The Faerie Queene, we must "assume that the poem, the world in the poem, and the world that the poem is in share a common ontology that is itself

allegorical", and goes on to describe these workings in terms that Proclus might have used of the Homeric epics or Pseudo-Dionysius of the Bible: "Ultimately perhaps all the words and things in the poem are synecdochic traces [read, '*eikones*'] of the wholeness they signify."[55]

Now, none of these critics (I think) would mean, by the claim that allegory presupposes something like a Neoplatonic metaphysics, that in order for there to be such a thing as allegory, the likes of Pseudo-Dionysius or Pico della Mirandola must actually have been approximately *right* in their descriptions of the extra-literary universe; certainly Miller, for one, explicitly conceives of the Neoplatonic ontology as an imaginary construction[56], and MacCaffrey, too, finds it necessary to use inverted commas in referring to such an ontology as "'objectively' valid". What these critics want to use as the basis for allegory's existence, then, is not the world's *actually* being constructed as the Neoplatonists describe it, but rather only its being *imagined* to be so. Now, this can be meant in one of two ways: either every allegorical work necessarily presents such a world to the reader's imagination before it can assign figurative meanings to its imagery; or else we, as readers, must bring to every allegory the imaginative assumption that such a Neoplatonic world exists in order to be able to read the poem's imagery figuratively.

I shall deal first with the latter alternative, since it is, in a sense, the grosser error. For to claim that interpreting the imagery of a poem figuratively depends on a metaphysical framework of interpretation which is brought to the poem by the reader rather than on something intrinsically present in the text is to lose sight of the characteristics of a specific work which make it allegorical. Thus Roche, for example, in explaining the nature of the allegorical meanings which he attributes to The Faerie Queene by reference to Harington's metaphysical justification for attaching allegorical readings to Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, overlooks the fact that what he is citing is a justification for commentating allegorically upon a poem which was not itself written as an allegory.[57] Such an explanation, which does not reveal what makes a work like The Faerie Queene an allegory in a way that the Orlando Furioso is not, is no explanation at all: it is merely a reinvoking of the old Proclean justification for building around a text a tradition of allegorical commentary, regardless of whether the text itself either calls for such commentary or offers any commentary upon itself (see Introduction (1): pp. 48-50). Thus, although Roche maintains that some works (such as The Faerie Queene) are allegories, and that others are not, his account of allegory leads logically to the conclusion that the kinds of commentary which he prescribes for

allegories could be made, with equal legitimacy, on any work whatever, as is perhaps most evident in his conclusion that *any* commentary on The Faerie Queene may legitimately be described as "an allegorical meaning" of the poem, so long as its "structural patterns" can be made to "coincide" with "the structural patterns of the narrative".[58] This is not a prescription for reading Spenser's allegory; it is a prescription for making an allegorical Spenser tradition.

The revival of this essentially Neoplatonic understanding of allegory is to be attributed in large part, I think, to Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism, which reintroduced many of its essential elements into critical thought. Frye made the connection between the modern activity of writing critical commentary on literature and the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance activity of writing allegorical commentary on poetry and scripture, pointing out that, in fact, "all commentary" as modern critics understand it "is allegorical interpretation".[59] In doing so, he made possible a direct comparison between the modern problem of the apparently illimitable amount of meaning which commentators of various critical schools can 'find' in a literary text such as Hamlet, and the medieval and Renaissance problem of the apparently illimitable number of allegorical meanings that can be attributed to passages in Scripture and poetry.[60] His solution, too,

was essentially medieval: as both Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius had done (each in a different way), he argued that commentary is limited, in general, not by the explicit content of each particular text, but by a total structure of meaning to which all texts refer.[61] He differed from the medieval and Renaissance inheritors of Augustinian and Dionysian thought principally in his disconnecting from any claims about the structure of the *extra-literary* universe the total structure of literary significance whose existence he postulated.[62] In other respects, his conception of an ideal order governed by a transcendental Logos looks conspicuously like the Christianized Neoplatonic metaphysics with reference to which medieval and Renaissance commentators (including Harington) claimed legitimacy for the figurative meanings which they attributed freely to Scripture and poetry.[63]

A critic like Roche proposes, as a basis for reading The Faerie Queene, something very like what Frye suggests as a basis for critical commentary in general: the revival of an essentially Neoplatonic idealism, without a corresponding commitment to Neoplatonism as a description of the extra-literary universe. Such a model of allegory may have a certain inherent appeal for the Spenser critic because, as we have seen, it is in accord with the fictional description that Spenser offers of his own allegory, in the proems to the various books of The Faerie Queene. In fact, it seems entirely possible that

the harmony between the model of allegory presented by Spenser in the proems to the various books of The Faerie Queene and the model articulated in Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism arises not merely from their common ancestry in Christian transformations of Neoplatonic theory: for Frye himself acknowledges the growth of the Anatomy of Criticism out of his work specifically on The Faerie Queene.[64] But even if Frye's approach to critical commentary has successfully established, between disparate periods, a connection which makes it possible for a modern critic like Roche to take seriously the methodology of a Renaissance allegorical commentator like Harington, it remains the case that Frye's account of allegorical commentary in general should never have been taken as a sufficient model for reading a poem like The Faerie Queene; as Frye himself makes clear, such a work, which "'is' an allegory" even before the commentators have made their additions to it, complicates the usual allegorical relation between text and critical commentary by becoming involved, itself, in the process whereby the critic creates an allegorical commentary upon it.[65] In missing this point, Roche goes seriously astray; for even if Frye's hypothesis concerning an ideal order of literary meaning were granted, what Roche proposes as a model specifically for reading allegories would in fact be insufficient for the purpose precisely insofar as the works with which he is concerned are

actually allegorical.

The remaining alternative for critics who wish to see allegory as having a basis in an imaginary Neoplatonic metaphysics, namely that every allegorical work necessarily presents such a world to the reader's imagination before it can assign figurative meanings to its imagery, we have already considered to some extent, with reference specifically to the allegory of The Faerie Queene. As we have seen, The Faerie Queene does present an imaginary world whose structure owes a great deal to the Platonic metaphysical tradition; and from a point of view within this imaginary world, it is true that it is in virtue of this metaphysical structure that certain objects -- for example, Guyon's shield -- bear iconic images which can be used allegorically as symbols of their metaphysical originals. It is even true that the poem itself is imagined as one of the objects within this world which bears iconic images that may be used symbolically on this basis. But it is also true that, from our point of view outside this imaginary world, the process is effectively reversed: for us, the imaginary world within which these processes of signification take place acquires Platonic qualities only because Spenser makes use of the Platonic tradition in exalting the qualities of the imaginary objects which are signified, in these cases, above those of the imaginary objects which are used to signify them; it would have been

equally possible (though less unambiguously complimentary and therefore less politically judicious) for him simply to have asserted that Belphoebe and Gloriana signify Queen Elizabeth -- without further defining *how* they are to be imagined as signifying her -- and the poem would have been no less allegorical as a result. Furthermore, it is far from true that all of the images in The Faerie Queene which are used figuratively are imagined as *eikones* of what they signify -- in fact, as I shall demonstrate, only a few of them *are* so imagined -- and once again, the poem is no less allegorical as a result. It is only if Spenser's imaginary characterization of his poem as a kind of 'mirror' is taken as a genuine and authoritative description of how, in its details, the poem works as an allegory, and then used as a prescription for reading these details figuratively, that the allegory of The Faerie Queene begins to seem to depend upon, or as David Lee Miller says, "to be organized with reference to", the Platonic structure of its imaginary world.[66] Miller, in giving a detailed account, on this basis, of what he takes to be the allegorical workings of the poem, makes the mistake which he himself neatly describes in a different context: he "misreads... [his] own procedure, offering as an act of decoding what is in fact the work of production."[67]

In order to see how little of The Faerie Queene's allegory is actually grounded in the Platonic structure

of its imaginary world, it may be useful, first, to point out some of the structures of imagery within this world which, although they are probably indebted to the Platonic tradition, are *not* used allegorically. Among these are the False Una (I.i.45*ff*) and the False Florimell (III.viii.5*ff*). Although they are presented, like Gloriana and the painting on Guyon's shield, as things created in imitation of superior originals, neither of these creatures is used, at any point, as a *symbol* of her original. On the contrary, the whole purpose of their creation is that they will be mistaken for the very things themselves of which they are copies; in this sense, they are the *opposite* of symbols. For, whereas to read an *eikon* symbolically is to direct one's attention through the copy toward that of which it is a copy, and in so doing to gain a sense of the qualitative difference that sets the two apart, the intention in these cases is to direct attention away from what is copied and toward the copy, and in so doing to cause the inferior qualities of the copy to be mistaken for the true qualities of the original. What the False Una and the False Florimell resemble in the Platonic scheme is not the imagery (such as the diagrams of the geometers or the imaginary world of the story of the cave) which is used figuratively to represent things not available to literal language or to the powers of the senses, but rather the imagery which Plato describes as being created

by those painters and poets who copy the mere superficial appearances of already visible things, and which then deceives the credulous into thinking that they are beholding the things themselves (Republic 596e-599a). Far from being allegorical itself, such a use of imagery was identified by Proclus as the perverse alternative to the legitimate, allegorical kind of art (see Introduction (1): pp. 48-9); we may think of it as being, in a certain sense, allegory's opposite.

Some other pairs of The Faerie Queene's characters, as well as certain apparently 'paired' places, are sometimes thought of as standing in the relationship, to one another, of *eikon* and original: thus, for example, it is supposed that, just as the False Florimell is an inferior copy of the true, so in some sense Florimell herself is an inferior copy of Gloriana; or that the House of Pride and the Bower of Bliss are presented as debased images, respectively, of the House of Holiness and the Garden of Adonis.[68] It seems to me, though, that such interpretations read into the imaginary world of The Faerie Queene a structure that is not intrinsically there, since nowhere is it said (and indeed, it would be memorably strange if it *were* the case) that Florimell is a copy of Gloriana or that the Bower of Bliss is a copy of the Garden of Adonis. Certainly it is true that in each of these cases there is an explicit association between the two things: in the former instance, in

Arthur's mind, when he wishes that Florimell were Gloriana or that Gloriana were like Florimell (III.iv.54); and in the latter, in the narrator's contrasting of the evil and good Genii (II.xii.47-8). But in the one case, there is nothing to suggest a metaphysical basis to what is, after all, only a "wish"; and in the other, while clearly the two Genii are in some sense good and evil versions of the same thing, there is no particular reason to think of the evil Genius as a *copy* of the good, any more than we ordinarily think of our 'worser self' as the *copy* of our 'better self'. However, even if such a Platonic structure were granted to the relationships between these pairs of images, it would remain the case that the things which are considered derivative copies -- Florimell, the Bower, the evil Genius, the House of Pride, and so on -- are not used, figuratively, as symbols of their originals, but rather, if anything, as distractions from them. For example, Arthur does not use Florimell in the way that he uses Guyon's shield, as a means of gaining a better appreciation of Gloriana; rather, in pursuing Florimell he is distracted from his pursuit of Gloriana, and in wishing that "that Lady faire mote bee/ His Faery Queene.../ Or that his Faery Queene were such, as shee", he conflates, rather than distinguishes, the respective qualities of the two. Just as Redcross, in failing to distinguish copy from original, mistakenly supposes that

the qualities of the False Una are the true qualities of Una herself, so, here, Arthur mistakenly wishes that the qualities of Florimell (which, for the sake of argument, we are calling the inferior qualities of the *eikon*) were the true qualities of Gloriana (whom we are calling the original). So even granting a Platonic structure to such relationships, we must still conclude that what is structured Platonically in such cases is not the allegorical use of the poem's imagery, but precisely its *non*-allegorical use.

Certainly there are instances in The Faerie Queene of imaginary things which resemble images used traditionally by Neoplatonists as symbols of imaginary intelligible realities: for example, the hermaphroditic statue in the Temple of Venus.[69] But such traditional esoteric images are fairly rare in the poem; and we would soon go astray if we assumed that all of the images in The Faerie Queene which look like images used commonly by Neoplatonists -- for example, the poem's representations of the pagan Gods -- were used by Spenser, in the Neoplatonic manner, to symbolize intelligible truths. For example, as I shall argue in Chapter One (pp. 207-13), Spenser sometimes uses the pagan Jove not as a symbolic *eikon* of the (Neoplatonically-influenced) Christian Deity, but rather as a figure which actually blocks recognition of the nature of this God. As for the various other images which Miller invokes in attempting to establish that the allegory of

The Faerie Queene is "organized with reference to" an "ontology that is itself allegorical", some of these have a far from convincing relationship to Platonic structures or traditions of any kind: for example, "the 'golden wall' that surrounds Cleopolis (II.x.72), [and] the name 'Telamond' at the head of Book IV".[70]

Finally, even the clearest examples of Platonic symbolism in The Faerie Queene, namely Arthur's use of the picture on Guyon's shield as a symbol of Gloriana and the imaginary reader's use of Gloriana and Belphoebe as symbols of the imaginary Elizabeth, do not clearly co-exist within a single, neatly-ordered Platonic cosmos such as Miller would have all the poem's imagery organize itself "with reference to". Rather, we have on one hand the chain of *eikones* that the ostensible author of the poem describes as leading from Belphoebe and Gloriana to Elizabeth and thence to God, and on the other the chain that Guyon describes as leading from the painting on his shield to Gloriana in the flesh to Gloriana's mind and once again, finally, to God; in the latter series, we proceed from Gloriana to God without passing Elizabeth along the way. Now, certainly it is possible to imagine a single, coherent Platonic order of which both these sequences are partial expressions; but the point that the poem itself does not do so may be of some importance. For the fact that Arthur's quest for Gloriana is never presented -- as the reader's interpretation of Gloriana

clearly is -- as a progress toward *Elizabeth* (despite Miller's suggestion to the contrary[71]) means that the two types of allegory which Spenser, in the Letter to Raleigh, calls the "general" and the "particular", and which are exemplified, respectively, by Arthur's pursuit of glory through Gloriana and the reader's pursuit of an ideal Elizabeth through Gloriana, are never presented as being ultimately one. The notion that the allegory of the poem is organized in such a way that it tends toward a single "vanishing point"[72], in the way that everything in a Neoplatonic cosmos leads symbolically, along converging chains of *eikones*, to the ineffable One, is something which The Faerie Queene encourages us to imagine through its description of itself as a link in such a chain, rather than something which is genuinely to be found in the details of its allegorical workings. In supposing that the allegory of The Faerie Queene really does work in this way, Miller ultimately mistakes what in other respects he recognizes as merely the poem's "ideal... image of itself" for the poem as it actually exists.[73]

Once we have established that the symbolic and Neoplatonic relationship which Spenser describes as existing between Queen Elizabeth and the characters Gloriana and Belphoebe is not a report of the actual workings of the poem's allegory but a fiction designed to compliment the queen, we may place this relationship

within the context where it really belongs, namely among the other fictional devices which Spenser employs in The Faerie Queene. When this is done, it may be seen, I think, that at least one episode in the poem's main narrative which presents to the reader's imagination a supposed *eikon*-and-original relationship actually draws to our attention the very imaginative process on which Spenser quietly relies in the proems, whereby the exalted qualities which appear in a so-called *eikon*, and which actually originate there, are subsequently extended from this image to its supposed paradigm.

Just as Spenser's queen is invited to look into his poem as if into a mirror in which she may see herself and her realms, so too the imaginary princess Britomart is confronted with a "mirrhour" in which she can see an image not only of her own face but of everything in the world which pertains to her (III.ii.17,19). But the images which Britomart sees do not necessarily show the things which they supposedly reflect as she will later find them; in particular, when she gazes upon her future husband, "She sees an imagined, idealized beauty, more attractive than the Salvage Knight proves to be in fact".[74] Like Spenser's imaginary, radiant queen, this image of Arthegall in the magic mirror is distinctly sun-like, his face appearing to Britomart "as *Phoebus* face out of the east" (III.ii.24); but neither this radiance nor the "Heroicke grace" with which he carries

himself are much in evidence when she meets the man himself. It is as if the image in Merlin's mirror is the real goal toward which Britomart strives, and of which Arthegall himself can never be more than an imperfect reflection. What is more, we as readers, like Britomart herself, are put in the position of searching in the later books of The Faerie Queene for an ideal Arthegall who in fact never appears so clearly as in the passage in Book Three in which Britomart sees him in the mirror. Both for Britomart and for ourselves, it is not simply that this 'mirror image' of Arthegall turns out not to be an accurate likeness of him, but that the image seems actually to have a certain priority over the man himself. Not only does it appear before him in the poem, but it seems more clearly aligned than does its supposed original with the conception of the knight of Justice, not to mention with his imaginary role in begetting the Tudor dynasty, a role which would seem to demand an unambiguously virtuous character if it is to be perceived as complimentary to Queen Elizabeth.

What Spenser means to achieve by drawing attention, in this way, to the very device by means of which he has repeatedly complimented Queen Elizabeth, is open to at least two quite different interpretations. On one hand, it is possible that in creating an image of Arthegall which does not accurately reflect its supposed original, he wishes delicately to demonstrate the artificiality of

the whole convention by means of which he has repeatedly complimented the queen, by pointing out that what is called a mirror in poetry does not necessarily show things as they really are.[75] On the other hand, the implications of the workings of Merlin's mirror with respect to the workings of the poem itself as a kind of magical mirror for Elizabeth may not be intended as subversive at all: rather, the point may be to draw attention to the magical powers of the poet himself who constructs the so-called 'mirror' in which the ideal figure appears, and thereby delicately to point out the positive influence that such a poet may have on the image of the one who is represented. 'Delicately', I say in either case: for if Spenser is conscious that it is only an imaginary queen for whom The Faerie Queene is a mirror and Gloriana and Belphoebe mirror images, then he is equally aware that the queen whom he compliments by means of this fiction is very real indeed.

(2.3) Spenser's Imaginary World -- A Prospectus

If, as I have argued, the ostensible author's attributions of overall structure to the figurative meaning of the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene turn out to be no more, in practice, than instances of the self-commentary which make the poem allegorical -- and not, as they are offered, authoritative descriptions of

what is already to be found in the poem prior to the prescriptive influence they may have on its commentators -- then the bulk of the task of describing the allegorical workings of The Faerie Queene lies still ahead of us. In the following chapters, I shall eschew the 'top-down' approach which attempts to comprehend the allegory of the poem through its overall representations of itself in the Letter to Raleigh, dedicatory sonnets, and proems, and begin, instead, with individual instances of the poem's figurative use of its own imagery, proceeding to generalizations only as patterns of recurrence and analogy emerge from amongst these. Before engaging in this project, however, it will be necessary for me to address an influential notion of the way that figurative meanings are attached to narrative details of The Faerie Queene, which I hope these introductory chapters will have allowed us to see as significantly misconstruing the poem's actual workings. Having done this, I shall proceed to glance ahead at some of the main themes that will emerge, in the chapters ahead, from my reading of the poem.

The misinterpretation of the poem's allegorical workings that I wish, first, to correct, consists in the idea that the figurative meanings of The Faerie Queene's imagery exist only, or at least principally, for us, its readers, rather than, in general, as parts of the actual or possible experience of the characters who inhabit the

world constituted by that imagery. As representatives of this view, I take two influential characterizations of the poem's allegory which come, respectively, from an early work by Harry Berger, Jr., and from a late work by C. S. Lewis. Berger, in The Allegorical Temper (1957), pauses from his analysis of Guyon's adventure in the cave of Mammon to generalize as follows:

> The basic situation -- almost too obvious to mention -- is this: in the concrete fictional world of the poem the character sees with his eyes the persons and places of the quest; the narrator, telling us of the character's sensory experiences, reveals -- through one or another poetic device -- their allegorical meanings... Allegory... is dark to the character in the story... [T]he translation of visible fact is made over the head of the hero to the reader...[76]

Lewis, in Spenser's Images of Life (1967), similarly extrapolates from his reading of allegory in The Faerie Queene "to notice certain principles... about allegory at large":

> First there is the paradox that, to the characters participating in an allegory, nothing is allegorical. They live in a world compact of wonders, beauties, and terrors, which are mostly quite unintelligible to them. Secondly and contrarily, our own experience while we read an allegory is double. It is divided between sharing the experiences of the characters in the story and looking at their life from somewhere outside it, seeing all the time meanings that are opaque from within.[77]

That such notions both of allegory generally and of Spenser's allegory in particular still have some currency

may be seen, for example, from comments made by Humphrey Tonkin in his recent book on The Faerie Queene (1989): "Normally", writes Tonkin, "we are in a position of far more knowledge than the characters could possibly have"; for as readers, "we are always aware that there is another dimension, another kind of meaning, hidden behind the... narrative."[78]

Now, there are some allegories of which such accounts would indeed be valid, namely, those allegories which I have called 'non-symbolic'. Thus, for example, in Plato's non-symbolic allegory of the cave, it is clearly the case that the figurative meanings which Socrates attributes to the world of his fable, and to the various images that make it up, do not exist *within* this imaginary world: for it is a point salient to his allegorical use of this world that, to the hypothetically released prisoner, the visible sun which eventually he would be able to look upon directly is the final ("*teleutaion*") object of his apprehension, and not (as it is for Socrates' interlocutors) merely a sign of something higher, namely the final ("*teleutaia*") goal of their education, the intelligible form of the Good (Republic 516b4, 517b9-c1). Nevertheless, Berger's and Lewis's accounts of allegory are not, as they suppose, true *in general* -- we may consider, for example, the allegorical Quest of the Holy Grail, in which typically the knights of the quest *do* come to know the figurative

meanings of their adventures, and actually to revalue their deeds on that basis (see Introduction (1): pp. 43-5) -- and neither, in practice, do they turn out to be largely true of The Faerie Queene.

There has, of late, been some considerable progress toward seeing the extent to which the allegory of The Faerie Queene is, in the terms that I have been using, symbolic: that is, the extent to which, as in the Quest of the Holy Grail, the figurative meanings of its images coexist with their literal meanings inside a single imaginary world. This progress is manifested in the new importance accorded, in some recent critical commentaries, to the involvement of The Faerie Queene's characters in interpreting (or 'reading') the places and situations in which they find themselves. Thus, for example, Tonkin's reiteration of the model of allegory propounded by Berger and Lewis is tempered by a recognition that "In Spenser action tends to be generated by the need to interpret: we begin with the data and the hero must make sense of them."[79] Indeed, it is even noted that the characters' experience as interpreters of their world tends to be analogous to our own experience as readers: thus, "Redcross and the reader are faced with a similar problem: understanding the phenomena they meet".[80] But I believe that we need to go further still, beyond seeing merely an analogy between our interpretive role outside the poem's imaginary world and that of the

characters inside it, as if the characters' interpretive activity were merely a fictional example of the task that is given primarily to the reader. Far more than this, the characters' acquiring or displaying knowledge of the figurative meanings of the things in their world is the regular mechanism by which the poem *creates* these figurative meanings in the first place; that is to say, it is largely *because* characters in the poem interpret their world figuratively that we as readers are able to do so.

In some cases, the character who, as commentator, facilitates our allegorical reading of the poem is someone who appears, at first hand, in the action which is to be interpreted -- someone, that is, for whom the imagery that is commented upon exists as immediate sense experience. Thus, for example, Guyon's companion the Palmer is actually looking at the rocks that have threatened their boat and at the "carkasses exanimate" (II.xii.7) which litter them when he interprets the scene allegorically:

> ...Behold th'ensamples in our sights,
> Of lustfull luxurie and thriftlesse wast:
> What now is left of miserable wights,
> Which spent their looser daies in lewd delights,
> But shame and sad reproch, here to be red,
> By these rent reliques, speaking their ill plights?
> Let all that liue, hereby be counselled,
> To shunne *Rocke of Reproch*, and it as death to dred.
>
> (II.xii.9).

As we shall see, such commentary which comes from the very mouths of those who participate in the poem's action is by no means uncommon in The Faerie Queene.

In other instances, however, the imaginary figure into whose mouth the poem's self-commentary is put is not someone who participates in the poem's action and encounters the imagery commented upon as actual sense experience, but rather the poem's ostensible author, whom we may follow recent critical practice in calling 'the narrator'. Now, it may not be immediately obvious that we should see the narrator of The Faerie Queene as someone who lives inside the imaginary world upon which he comments: for, fictional figure that he is, he might as easily occupy a *different* imaginary world from the characters in his narrative, just as the Socrates of Plato's Republic lives neither in the real world (that is, he is not identical with the *real* Socrates) nor in the world of the prisoners in his fable of the cave. But unlike Plato's Socrates, the narrator of The Faerie Queene is presented to the reader, from the very first stanza of the poem and with great regularity thereafter, not as the inventor but merely as a reporter of the stories which he tells. For him, the "Knights and Ladies" whose "gentle deeds" he intends to extol (I.Pr.1) are historically real characters, who have actually lived and acted, some centuries before his own time. Spenser did not have to present matters in this way: he could as

easily have presented his narrator as one who does not believe in the veracity of the stories he tells, or even as one who makes them up as he goes; alternatively, he could have presented his narrator as a contemporary of the poem's main characters, or even as one who knew them personally and actually witnessed or participated in the actions in which they are involved. But the fiction which he does choose is that the narrator is a historian, reporting the deeds done in a former age in the world which he himself inhabits.

Regardless, then, of whether a particular instance of the poem's self-commentary is presented as an utterance of one of the characters who takes part in the action or of the narrator who looks back on the action from a later age, it is in any case true that the text and the commentary are spoken from within the same imaginary world, or in other words, that the allegory is symbolic.

The principal qualification to be made to this description of the allegory of The Faerie Queene, it seems to me, is not that some of the *figurative* meanings of the poem's imagery do not exist within the imaginary world inhabited by its characters, but rather that some of its *literal* meanings do not exist there. In other words, the chief examples of non-symbolic allegory (and metaphor) in The Faerie Queene are those which have their *tenors*, rather than their *vehicles*, inside the world of the narrative. Amongst these are, for example,

the frequent epic similes comparing the progress of the knights in their adventures and of the narrator in reporting their adventures to that of a ship sailing through dangerous seas (I.vi.1, I.xii.1, II.ii.24, *etc.*). We may compare the place of such allegories as these in the symbolic imaginary world of The Faerie Queene to the place of the parable of the prodigal son within the symbolic Biblical history imagined by Saint Augustine (see Introduction (1): pp. 35-7): in each case, the non-symbolic allegory refers not *out* of the symbolic world to some other world beyond it, but rather *into* the symbolic world from another, fictional world -- a world which is invented, *ad hoc*, as a vehicle for referring to truths inside the world of the main narrative.

Now it is true, of course, that the knowledge of characters inside the world of The Faerie Queene's main narrative does not always encompass all the figurative meanings of the things in their experience; but this is no more than a kind of dramatic irony.[81] The things which they do not know, if these things are parts of the poem at all, are not things which they cannot in principle know -- not things which, as Berger and Lewis imagine, are separated from the world of their experience by a boundary intrinsic to the nature of allegory itself. On the contrary, they are things which are true within their very own world, and which they could potentially learn, as Guyon learns the allegorical meanings of

obstacles such as the Rock of Reproach by listening to the pronouncements of the Palmer. (We might compare the way in which the knights of the Quest of the Holy Grail tend not to know the figurative meanings of their adventures while performing them, but are nevertheless able to learn these meanings afterwards by listening to the explanations offered by the various monks and hermits whom they meet.)

Given, then, that within The Faerie Queene the relations between literal and figurative meanings are, for the most part, symbolic -- that is, internal to the imaginary world presented by the poem -- it remains to be seen what form these imaginary symbolic relations take. Do they resemble the symbolic relations ('Augustinian' and 'Pseudo-Dionysian') that shape the imaginary world which is sometimes called the medieval or Renaissance world picture (see Introduction (1), pp. 53-4), or do they take an entirely different form? Such a question cannot be answered fully prior to the detailed investigation of the way that the poem presents its world to us; but an initial clue, at least, to the general form of the poem's symbolism would seem to lie in what was said above: namely, that The Faerie Queene, as a narrative, is presented to the reader as an enormous, fictional act of *retelling* -- a retelling of something which, from the point of view of the fictional narrator, is true. In choosing to create this particular fictional

relationship between the narrator of The Faerie Queene and the story narrated, Spenser involves his narrator in one of the poem's important themes, the theme of report. To introduce this theme briefly: it is one thing for Spenser's principal characters to perform their missions successfully; but it is something beyond this for their successes to be translated into the good report that will bestow fame and glory upon them. Having overcome the pitfalls that jeopardize their quests themselves, it remains for them to overcome the threat of slander that jeopardizes their receiving their due rewards. This theme is prominent from the first book, in which the Redcross knight's slaying of the dragon is only the penultimate action, the final one being the contest in the home of Una's parents between his version of the story and the rival version presented by Archimago; it becomes still more prominent as the poem progresses, until, in the 1596 installment, slander itself appears as the most intractable of adversaries for Spenser's knights -- and indeed, for the narrator himself.

Because the narrator of The Faerie Queene is presented as a reporter of historical events, the story which he supposedly narrates -- that is, the whole of the poem -- itself takes on an imaginary role in preserving for these knights that which is so important to them, namely a memory of their accomplishments, in a version which does credit to their names (I.Pr.1-2). At the same

time, however, the narrator is made liable to all the difficulties which beset a reporter of past events. In any retelling of events, there are the possibilities, on one hand, of getting the story wrong, either through error or through bias, and on the other, of being suspected of having got the story wrong for one or both of these reasons. (It has been widely observed of late that, as Carolynn Van Dyke puts it, "the narrator's comments are the reactions of a fallible observer".[82] I am adding the point that not only may the narrator be fallible, but he may *intentionally* misconstrue the action upon which he comments.) Of course, the events reported in The Faerie Queene never really happened in the world outside the poem; consequently, a sense of the distinction between events themselves and the report of them can exist only insofar as the poem itself creates it, by actively drawing attention to the possibilities of bias and error in the voices of his storytellers -- which means, effectively, by drawing attention to the active role of these storytellers as interpreters of the stories that they report.[83]

If, in The Faerie Queene, the symbolic relationships between the literal and figurative meanings of the poem's imagery are assimilated, to some degree, to the relationship between events and reports, then in order to be able to describe these symbolic relationships, we will need, first, to give consideration to the ways in which

the poem's characters, including its narrator, become involved in reporting the poem's events. Some of the questions I will consider in doing so are the following: Why do these characters become involved in the reporting of events? What do they accomplish in their acts of reporting? What sorts of interpretations do they make of events? And, what errors or vested interests do their interpretations reveal? Only as these questions are answered will it become possible, by increments, to describe the imaginary symbolic world within which the The Faerie Queene's literal and figurative meanings co-exist; and only, I think, to the extent that we can describe this world, can we really lay claim to having understood the workings of Spenser's allegory.

Notes to Introduction (2):

[1] See the recent article by Wayne Erickson, pp.167-8, for a catalogue of articles which deal with the Letter to Raleigh's relationship to the poem.

[2] Hamilton (1961) 54; Lewis (1967) 140. See also Erickson 140.

[3] Given that Spenser has said, "In that Faery Queene I mean glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue that most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene", it would seem most likely that in the statement, "in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence in particular", there is a slip for "in general". This point is not entirely original with me; compare what is said by Kouwenhoven 11-12.

[4] Variorum vol. 1, pp. 422-95, vol. 2, pp. 400-13; Wells, preface (unnumbered); Watson 59-60.

[5] Watson 60.

[6] Honig 95.

[7] Ariosto, trans. Harington, *passim*.

[8] Kouwenhoven 29; compare Honig 95.

[9] Hamilton (1961) 32.

[10] Hamilton (1961) 7-9, 32; Roche 15.

[11] Kouwenhoven 30.

[12] Hankins 21.

[13] Hankins 26.

[14] Hankins 26.

[15] Hankins 21.

[16] Hankins 23-5, with reference to the Fairfax translation of Gerusalemme Liberata.

[17] Hankins 23.

[18] Parker 169.

[19] Hamilton (1961) 56; Nohrnberg 39; Alastair Fowler (1973) 73.

[20] Hankins 23; Alastair Fowler (1973) 73; see also Kouwenhoven 5.

[21] Alastair Fowler (1973) 74.

[22] Nohrnberg 42.

[23] Hamilton (1961) 150.

[24] As noted, for example, by Van Dyke 253.

[25] Thus, for example, Meyer 36: "We are led... to believe that the Redcrosse knight has defeated Error in the abstract and thus is free to go on to further adventures... [But] In fact, although he has defeated Error, the remainder of Redcrosse's adventures center on his falling prey to various manifestations of error... Error may have appeared to him in the form of a dragon, but indeed she is not a ferocious dragon. Exposed and brought to battle, obvious manifestations of error are easily defeated, and those who think their defeat has been a glorious and final victory are doomed to fall prey to error in its more subtle manifestations".

[26] See also Erickson 155, who argues for "the inadequacy of any contention that Spenser promulgates or sustains a single view of allegorical composition," and that in the Letter to Raleigh, in particular, he simply "fits the theory to the occasion" of presenting the poem publicly, then "does whatever he wants in the poetry itself".

[27] Hankins 30.

[28] Greenlaw 60-1, Hamilton (1961) 7-8, and in The Faerie Queene, p. 24; Kouwenhoven 97 and *passim*.

[29] Smith 140 & *passim*. (Extracts from this article may be found in Variorum vol. 4, pp. 306-7).

[30] Smith 143.

[31] Roche 161, Nohrnberg 573-4, and Hankins 233 see Florimell's beauty in Platonic terms, as the 'true beauty' originating in the soul; Hamilton (1961) 149 argues that the virtuousness of Arthur in pursuing her demonstrates her exalted allegorical significance; Lewis (1967) 120 comments on her poor judgement in being afraid of Arthur. See also Heale's assessment of Arthur as "a loyal.... lover" (11).

[32] Williams 83; Van Dyke 266-7, quoting Williams.

[33] Alastair Fowler (1973) 74; see also Nohrnberg 38-44.

[34] Alastair Fowler (1973) 72; compare Lewis (1967) 133-4.

[35] Van Dyke 263; Williams (1966) 83. There may also, of course, be a joke here, in that what the narrator attributes to Britomart's chastity may have more to do with her not sharing the male knights' erotic interest in Florimell; but even if this is so, concluding the scene with the view from Britomart's perspective still provides a critical perspective upon it, and in particular on the 'typically male' behaviour which joins Arthur and Guyon in a common pursuit with a "griesly Foster".

[36] Lewis (1967) 120.

[37] Lewis (1967) 124.

[38] Lewis (1967) 120.

[39] Van Dyke 279.

[40] Readers who find frequent or even systematic discrepancies between action and commentary in the body of the poem include Williams (1969) 139, Dees 555, Van Dyke 257, Berger (1988) 473, and Meyer 34-5.

[41] As noted by the Variorum editors, vol. 1., p.449.

[42] Greenlaw 60*ff*; Hamilton (1961) 7-9 and in The Faerie Queene, p. 24. See also Variorum vol. 1, pp. 449-95, for a summary of the centuries-long tradition of this sort of commentary, and Kermode 36-7 for an assessment of the tradition of reading topical allusions into the poem and of Greenlaw's impact upon this tradition.

[43] Erickson 153 makes this point particularly of the Letter to Raleigh.

[44] Regarding the Letter to Raleigh, see footnotes 1 and 2, above. Regarding the "I" within the poem, see for example Durling 2, Williams (1969) 137-9, Hinton 170-1, Berger (1988) 473; see also Wayne C. Booth 73 for a formative influence on this line of criticism.

[45] Lewis (1967) 17.

[46] Montrose 317-18, 321; Miller 3, citing Montrose.

[47] Miller 3-4, 19, 68; (quote, p. 3). It should be noted, in fairness, that Miller *also* sees, in Spenser's accounts of Belphoebe and Gloriana as copies of Elizabeth which fall short of their original due to the inadequacy of art to capture "the transcendence of her splendour", a tactical device for deflecting potential criticism of his representations or even for introducing "covert criticisms of one whom it would be dangerous to fault openly" (100-101); but he maintains that "Spenser's portrayal of Elizabeth... remains on balance a work of glorification, specifically glorification of the body politic in the person of Elizabeth" (6), and it is in this respect that I have cited his interpretation.
See also Greenblatt 192 for ideology as the "outside" of the literary world of The Faerie Queene, to which the poem subordinates itself.

[48] Thus Montrose 325 argues that "What the poet conventionally deprecates as his inability to produce an adequate reflection of the glorious royal image" is in fact a means "by which the text appropriates that image, imposing on it its own specificity." See also 331, where, without wishing "to deny that there exists an authority 'beyond the poem,'" Montrose argues for the importance in Spenser's poetry of "the process of representing the queen *within* his discourse" (emphasis mine).

[49] As Montrose observes with reference to the April eclogue of The Shepheardes Calender, "What is at issue here is not merely the representation of Queen Elizabeth in Spenser's poem but the representation of that representation..." (322).

[50] I quote Wayne C. Booth 73, who sensibly argues for measuring the extent of the irony at the expense of a narrator not from an attempted reconstruction of the historical author and his lived values but from the author and values implied by the work as a whole (75).

[51] See also Miller's discussion of this passage, pp. 145-7.

[52] Miller 102 observes the Platonism of the poet's offering Gloriana to Elizabeth as her *eikon*.

[53] Roche 7.

[54] MacCaffrey 24.

[55] Miller 13, 72-3.

[56] Miller 92-4.

[57] Roche 8-10.

[58] Roche 10.

[59] Frye 89.

[60] Frye 72.

[61] Frye 342. Augustine had argued that the validity of figurative interpretation depends on its accordance with established Christian doctrine (see Intro (1): 25); Pseudo-Dionysius had delimited the range of valid figurative interpretation by describing exegesis as a 'moving upwards' ("*anagoge*") toward the ontological origin of the imagery commented upon (see Intro (1): 51).

[62] Frye 125-6.

[63] Frye 115-8, 120.

[64] Frye vii.

[65] Frye 90; see also 54.

[66] Miller 4.

[67] Miller 80, referring to the Neoplatonic erotic discipline which "derives the heavenly logos from an image of the body".

[68] Lewis (1967) 135-6; Alastair Fowler (1973) 68-73. For a commentary on the tendency to structure the poem's imagery in such a manner, see Van Dyke 284, who observes that because "Spenser often defracts a single plot motif through episodes with divergent or even opposing meanings... many readers come to regard successive episodes and agents as parts of larger units or versions of each other", and concludes that "Such connections turn out to be unstable but irresistible".

[69] Lewis (1967) 15-16; the image is cited as a part of the poem's allegorical structure by Miller 72.

[70] Miller 72 (and passages quoted previously from Miller 4 & 13).

[71] Miller 144: "Spenser tells us clearly enough... that Fairyland is an image of the queen's person, realm, and ancestry... To pursue Gloriana, then, is to follow a metaphor -- even for Arthur...".

[72] Miller 4.

[73] Miller 81.

[74] Hamilton, in The Faerie Queene III.ii.24n; see also Paglia (1990) 183.

[75] Compare Patterson 90, who sees a critical distance in Spenser's poem from all its idealized representations of the Elizabethan regime. I shall return to Patterson's reading of The Faerie Queene, and to the question of whether drawing attention to the process by which such idealized versions of reality are constructed necessarily subverts that process, in Chapter One (pp. 205-215).

[76] Berger (1957) 35.

[77] Lewis (1967) 28-9.

[78] Tonkin 50, 57.

[79] Tonkin 38; see also Mallette *passim*.

[80] Tonkin 54; compare Heale 12, Meyer 35.

[81] The possibility of dramatic irony at the expense of *one* of the poem's characters -- namely the narrator -- has been widely observed: see especially Van Dyke 256 (citing an unpublished dissertation by Oliver Steele), who observes that what the narrator misses is often precisely the figurative meaning of the episode he comments upon. In a sense, I am merely extending this point to the *other* characters in the imaginary world of the poem.

[82] Van Dyke 254; see also, for example, Williams (1969) 139, Berger (1988) 473, and Meyer 35.

[83] Compare Williams (1969) 141-3.

Chapter One:

The Legend of Holiness -- Making One's Way

What is perhaps most striking about the way in which the story develops in the first book of The Faerie Queene is just how quickly it deviates from the course announced for it in the Letter to Raleigh and in the pageant-like opening stanzas of the book's first canto. The very first event that takes place, as the static quality of the opening pageant gives way to action, is that the story's protagonists turn aside from their progress toward their goal (I.i.6-7), promptly to lose their way altogether (I.i.10). In spite of superficial appearances to the contrary (which we shall need to investigate) (I.i.27-8), this way, once lost, is something which they never even *begin* genuinely to regain until after the half-way mark in their adventures -- if, indeed, they can properly be said ever genuinely to have been 'on course' in the first place.

The Redcross knight's victory over the monster Errour (I.i.14-26) does *seem* to bring to an end the going astray

which has characterized the adventure of "the wandring wood" (I.i.13), in that after Errour has been slain, the knight and his companions, by refusing to be tempted away from the main path "to any by-way", are able quickly to find the route out of the labyrinthine forest which previously had eluded them, and so to pass "forward on... [their] way" (I.i.28). The sense that the victory over the monster has been a turning point in this respect is augmented by our being told that, after the battle, they go "backward" the way they came rather than pressing on in the same direction (I.i.28); and this sense is further reinforced, to give the impression that the knight's success at arms has had a positive significance with respect to the progress of his quest at large, first by Una's greeting his achievement as a feat "worthy... of that Armorie" which he has donned in order to undertake his mission against the dragon (I.i.27), and further by the narrator's parenthetical indication that, as Redcross continues "on his way", he does so "with God to frend" (I.i.28).

Despite all this, however, there are also ominous indications that the path which the trio follows out of the woods -- and apparently beyond it -- is the wrong one. In the first place, in spite of what I said above about its indicating a turning point in the adventure, there does seem to be something inherently suspicious about their proceeding "backward" out of the forest, when

progress in the quest is otherwise virtually *defined* in terms of going "forward" (I.i.28, *etc.*); indeed, we may question to what extent the change of direction does represent a significant turning point, after all, given that the path they follow after the knight's victory is the same one that led them to Errour's cave in the first place (albeit they now follow it in the opposite direction), and that it is once again problematically described as "That path... which beaten was most plaine" (I.i.28; compare I.i.11, "That path... which beaten seemd most bare", as well as the "broad high way.../ All bare through peoples feet" which leads to the House of Pride (I.iv.2) and the "broad high way" which, according to Caelia, "All keepe... and take delight/ With many... for to go astray" (I.x.10) -- all of them reminiscent of the Biblical "broad waye", trodden by "manie", "that leadeth to destruction" (Matthew 7:13)).[1] A. C. Hamilton, with his suggestion that the path through the wandering wood must have been "beaten... by those entering rather than leaving"[2], implies that, after Errour is defeated, the knight and his companions should be seen as following the "beaten" path not *toward* destruction but away from it; but there is nothing in the poem itself thus to mitigate the ominous effect of the repetition of the unfavourable description as the party retraces its steps. Even the apparently commendable resoluteness with which they now stick to this path until it takes them out of the forest

is very like what they showed, *before* they encountered Errour, in "resoluing forward still to fare,/ Till that some end they finde or in or out" (I.i.11). Since, as it turns out, the "beaten" path which they resolve to follow to the "end" leads both "in" *and* "out" of the forest, we might reasonably suppose that there is less difference between the one "end" of this path and the other than seems, superficially, to be the case. If this were so, then we would have to see Redcross, on leaving the woods, not as having recovered from error and regained the right path, but as having been erroneously confirmed in his resolute following of the *wrong* one.[3]

Such an interpretation of the opening events of the first book seems to accord better with what happens next than does a more traditional and more trusting reading which takes as authoritative Una's and the narrator's respective claims that his victory over the monster has advanced the knight in his quest and that it has earned him God's approbation. For, as has been frequently observed by the poem's commentators, the Redcross knight wins what Una calls the "great glory" of victory over Errour (I.i.27) and, as the narrator says, proceeds "forward on his way (with God to frend)" (I.i.28) only for him to stray almost immediately into the succession of errors that leaves him, ultimately, a wretched and despairing captive in Orgoglio's dungeon (I.viii.38-41).[4]

What we need to reckon with here is the wrong

interpretation of the Redcross knight's encounter in the wandering wood, not only from within the poem (as in the narrator's confident ascription of God's approval to the knight's actions), but, more consequentially, from within the narrative itself. When they first arrive at the "hollow caue,/ Amid the thickest woods" (I.i.11) which is to be the site of the confrontation, Una warns her champion against wilfully exposing himself to the grave danger of a needless battle (I.i.12-13); but the knight insists on making trial of the darkness, apparently determined to prove that he is no coward, and bolstered by an inflated sense of his own virtuous self-sufficiency (I.i.12-14). Now, none of this would seem to have anything to do with the confrontation with theological error that is usually found in this episode, nor, more generally, with the kind of knighthood that one puts on in donning "the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul" (Letter to Raleigh); and were the episode to continue as it begins, we might never have supposed that it did represent such things, or indeed that there were any other 'Error' before us than that which entangles a "youthfull" knight who is presumptuously "greedy" to prove his prowess (I.i.14).[5] What can mislead us into revising our assessment of this rash encounter in the knight's favour, however, is that Una rashly revises hers, in her joy and relief at her knight's triumphant escape from mortal peril. Whereas earlier, she had

argued the "wisedome" of proceeding forward only with the greatest of caution (I.i.13), now she herself comes forward "in hast", in order "to greet his victorie" (I.i.27), and says to him,

> ...Faire knight, borne vnder happy starre...
> Well worthy be you of that Armorie,
> Wherein ye haue great glory wonne this day,
> And proou'd your strength on a strong enimie,
> Your first aduenture: many such I pray,
> And henceforth euer wish, that like succeed it may.
>
> (I.i.27).

It is only, I think, if we take this retrospective celebration of the knight's battle with Errour to be a reliable interpretation of the encounter's significance that Errour herself seems to require the kind of figurative meaning which is usually attributed to her, and which makes her defeat seem to be the worthy endeavour of a specifically Christian knight. (Even the "bookes and papers" which she vomits (I.i.20) -- and to which I shall return a little later -- are never clearly identified with the erroneous theology that they are usually supposed to represent.) That we are rash if, on the basis of Una's gloss, we take the monster to be a personification of theological error, seems to me to be strongly indicated by the fact that the knight himself, who appears to treat Una's interpretation of the battle as reliable, in doing so confirms himself in the very errant path upon which he has set out in his "first

aduenture". In particular, he seems to take to heart Una's prayer that he should have "many such" adventures; for no sooner has he got "out of the wood" than "He passed forth, and new aduenture sought" (I.i.28). This, it would seem, is strange behaviour, coming from someone who is already committed to the mission of slaying the dragon which is wreaking havoc on Una's homeland. Nor can we properly dismiss this line as merely a formulaic bridge between one encounter and the next, for the knight continues to show precisely the same interest when "At length they... meet vpon the way" someone who might have news "Of straunge aduentures, which abroad did pas" (I.i.29-30). It becomes clear that the knight intends immediately to pursue the adventure which Archimago offers, "Of a straunge man.../ That wasteth all this countrey farre and neare" (I.i.31). Indeed, if by the time he leaves Archimago's dwelling (I.ii.6), the knight has altogether abandoned his original quest, it would seem that this has not been entirely the result of the wizard's nocturnal enchantments: on the contrary, it is as if the knight himself, by the time he first meets Archimago, has already forgotten about "that infernall feend" (I.i.5) who is the proper adversary of the Christian knight, having become far more interested in amassing, for his own "great glory", "many such" victories as that which he won over Errour.

We might suppose that Una would step in, at the point

where her knight's forgetfulness becomes apparent, with a timely reminder of the undertaking to which he is already committed. Far from it, however, she offers only the conventional advice which a wandering knight of the secular romance tradition might expect to hear -- advice which not only encourages Redcross in the errant self-image which she already has unwittingly fostered, but which proves to be quite disastrous in its own right:

> Now (sayd the Lady) draweth toward night,
> And well I wote, that of your later fight
> Ye all forwearied be...
>
> Then with the Sunne take Sir, your timely rest,
> And with new day new worke at once begin:
> Vntroubled night they say giues counsell best.
>
> (I.i.32-3).

As we know, it is anything but an "Vntroubled night" that lies in store for the Redcross knight. Archimago, in seconding Una's suggestion -- "Right well Sir knight ye haue aduised bin" (I.i.33) -- is wickedly ironic; for in fact Una, as much as the knight himself, is walking, without so much as being prompted, into his trap.[6]

The mistake which the Redcross knight makes, and which Una exacerbates, in the encounters with Errour and Archimago is comparable to the mistake made by many of the knights in the Quest of the Holy Grail, who suppose that their ordinary *modus operandi* as knights of the secular romance tradition will be appropriate to a quest whose nature is spiritual and symbolic.[7] Prior to the

start of the Grail Quest, the customary way of increasing one's knightly renown was to ride forth in search of adventures and causes to be championed; but once the adventure of the Grail begins, the established values are inverted, and such straying from encounter to encounter, with no overall purpose save the augmenting of one's own glory, becomes a positive detriment to the accomplishment of a task which requires both humility, and the symbolic interpretation of each individual encounter with a view to the ultimate goal. So, too, the hero of the Legend of Holiness seems, in his early adventures, not yet fully to have grasped the spiritual nature of his mission against "that infernall feend" (I.i.5), or of the Redcross armour which he has put on in order to accomplish it; he appears, rather, to conceive of himself in conventional romance terms, as a wandering (or "errant" (I.ii.34, I.x.10, *etc.*)) champion of causes and righter of wrongs.[8] The monster, Errour, which he first encounters epitomizes not erroneous theology but the kind of opponent which an errant knight must continually seek out and destroy in order to sustain his own mode of existence; as such, she is not a summing up of all error in one creature, in such a way that it can be conveniently dispensed with all at once, but rather an exemplary case of the kind of encounter of which there can always be "many" more (I.i.27).[9] Even the mass of books which Errour vomits, although it is not clearly identified, could as easily be

taken to represent the endless profusion of stories of knight-errantry which were known and read in Spenser's time, as to refer, for example, to the abstruse theological errors of "Sabelianism, Nestorianism, Manichaeism, as well as Arianism"[10] -- all of which were probably rather further than the secular romances from popular consciousness, and which were further, too, from the minds of Protestant thinkers concerned to reform the nation's reading habits.[11]

Now, to argue, as I have done, that Una is a poor interpreter and a poor adviser in the first canto of The Faerie Queene, and that her interventions are a factor in the Redcross knight's going astray, will no doubt require some defense. For while the apparently authoritative commentating voice of the poem's narrator, which Spenser critics once took straight, is now widely seen as frequently, if not systematically, the butt of irony (see Introduction (1): pp.97-8), the corresponding authoritativeness of Una's commentating voice seems (whether out of sentimental attachment to the character or in deference to the fact that she is repeatedly referred to as "Truth" (I.ii.Arg, I.iii.Arg)) to have remained as inviolate as the character herself.[12] But if, in the first encounter with Archimago, she can offer such patently bad advice -- advice in which she fails as completely as the knight himself to recognize either the inappropriateness of the proposed mission or the badness

of its proposer -- then why should we accept, without putting it to the test, her assessment of his victory over Errour only a few stanzas earlier? In fact, as we shall see, Una and the narrator are similar to one another in the sort of unreliability which they exhibit throughout the course of the Redcross knight's spiritual degeneration in the first half of Book One: for both of them tend to act the part of the knight's apologist, praising his actions for better or for worse, whether he behaves righteously or sinfully.

In spite of this unreliability, however, it remains the case that Una and the poem's narrator are *our* principal interpreters of the action in the early part of the first book: thus, for example, it is when Una reads the knight's victory over Errour as an exemplary adventure which he should strive often to imitate, and when the narrator promptly seconds her assessment, that the exemplary allegory which the Letter to Raleigh has promised us seems to begin emerging from out of the poem's action. But since the interpretation of this first episode from within the imaginary world of the poem (as its effects on the knight himself show) is a *mis*interpretation, we might say that, in a sense, it is not only the story itself, but the moral allegory which is built upon this story, that begins to go astray as soon as the poem's action gets underway. It is because these two things -- the story and its interpretation --

go off track together, that it can seem, paradoxically, as if all is still well at the time when the Redcross knight leaves the wandering wood and proceeds "forward on his way". What seem to be the moral standards by which we may judge the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the actions undertaken in the story turn out to be based, themselves, on the unreliable opinions of the characters engaged in that story -- and indeed, to be the basis, within the action, for the misplaced self-confidence which accounts for their persistence in going astray. We are in danger, ourselves, of misapprehending the significance of the characters' actions, because the means by which we are encouraged to interpret the poem are entangled, from the beginning, in the characters' own misapprehension of what sort of story they are meant to be involved in.

If the Redcross knight's going astray at the beginning of his quest can be linked to the fact that neither he nor Una seems to have a clear idea, in the first place, of what sort of story he is meant to be involved in, then the beginning of the movement which leads to his rehabilitation and the ultimate success of his mission can be marked, in contrast, at the point where the story in which he is supposed to be taking part is clearly articulated -- that is, at the point in the seventh canto where Una *retells* this story, in response to the queries of Prince Arthur (I.vii.43-51). It is the

first time that the dragon quest has been mentioned by the characters themselves who are involved in it; and the first time, in fact, since the narrator's reference to it at the opening of the first canto, that it has been mentioned at all. Now, suddenly, the forsaken purpose is restored to view -- both for the characters in the story, and for us, its readers. It is by saying what was meant to be happening, as much as by explaining what has gone wrong, that Una begins the process of putting the story back on track. As the Letter to Raleigh tells us, it was her telling of this same story at the court of the Faery Queen which set the quest in motion in the first place; now, in encouraging her to renew that act of storytelling with which the quest began, Arthur renews the story's impetus toward a successful conclusion.

Importantly, in telling Arthur about the dragon quest from which her knight has been distracted, Una emphasizes the unfitness for that mission of ordinary "knights aduenturous", "Full many" of whom have already become the dragon's "pitteous pray" (I.vii.45). The specific reason for their failing -- their "want of faith, or guilt of sin" (I.vii.45) -- recalls for the reader the symbolic nature of the battle that is to be fought against "that old Dragon" (I.xi.Arg.) or "that infernall feend" (I.i.5) (compare the battle, in Revelation 20:9, against "the dragon that olde serpent, which is the deuil and Satan"), and it shows, too, that Una herself is aware of the

qualities which are required of the Christian knight who is to win this fight. Once reunited with her champion, she proceeds to make certain that he becomes, finally, a knight of precisely these qualities: no longer does she ride "beside" him (I.i.4), nor act as his apologist regardless of what course of action he chooses, but rather takes the lead in actively guiding him toward his proper goal, and interprets the significance of situations and events not reactively or apologetically but always in relation to this goal that lies ahead. And just as, with her earlier inept responses to the knight's actions, she misled both Redcross himself and any trusting reader into seeing the knight's problematic behaviour as exemplary, so now her astute responses to events put both knight and reader back on track toward the correct interpretation and the proper conclusion of the quest.

Una is inaugurated, into the new role of reliable and constructive interpreter which she plays in the second half of Book One, with her correct identification of Duessa as "falshood" (I.viii.49). The poem's readers have been privileged with an awareness of Duessa's figurative meaning since reading the argument to the book's second canto, but only now, with Una's gloss on the significance of Duessa's deformity, is this meaning made clearly available to the characters themselves who are taking part in the developing story. Only in thus

putting a period to her enemy's destructive influence over the course that their story takes (an influence about which we shall have more to say) does Una clearly mark the end of the misleading influence that she herself had in the knight's early adventures, and begin to show herself worthy of the name "Truth" which has been associated with her from the time when her enemy Duessa was first named "falshood" (I.ii.Arg.). Hereafter, Una is shown continually guiding her knight in his quest, always with an eye to bringing him, in a state of physical and spiritual readiness, to the scene of the battle that he must eventually fight with the dragon (I.ix.20, I.x.2, I.xi.1-3). When necessary, moreover, she now forcefully reminds him of this mission, as she so notably failed to do upon their first encountering Archimago: thus, seeing him about to succumb to the persuasions of Despair,

> Out of his hand she snatcht the cursed knife,
> And threw it to the ground, enraged rife,
> And to him said, Fie, fie, faint harted knight,
> What meanest thou by this reprochfull strife?
> Is this the battell, which thou vauntst to fight
> With that fire-mouthed Dragon, horrible and bright?
>
> (I.ix.52).

In sum, Una takes on an active and critical role in the developing story -- becoming at once storyteller, interpreter, and guide -- for the sake of forwarding the quest.

Prior to Una's assuming this role, the functions of storyteller and guide are performed principally by Una's especial "foe" (I.vii.50), Duessa. Although Una, and, later, Redcross himself, tend to emphasize Duessa's power in "witchcraft" (I.vii.50) and the "wicked arts" (I.xii.32), it is, for the most part, not literally magical spells which we see Duessa casting over her victims, but rather spellbindingly deceptive lies; it is, in other words, through her consummate skill in storytelling that she principally deceives. Thus, in her very first meeting with the Redcross knight, she quickly summons up (I.ii.22-6) the sort of account of herself that will make her seem most fitting as a companion to the knight of Holiness -- in fact, very like the account which the Letter to Raleigh tells us that Una gave of herself at Faery court, as a result of which the knight was assigned to her. The very name which Duessa gives herself in this account, "Fidessa" (I.ii.26), implies her rightness for the role which she usurps. This taking of a name for herself is particularly important as an act of establishing control over the storytelling that takes place within the poem, not only insofar as it contributes to the history which she invents for herself, but more importantly, because it allows her to evade association with the stories told about her by others, as is revealed almost immediately by her escaping the knight's detection as the villainous Duessa of Fradubio's story

(I.ii.34-42). By separating herself from the reports associated with her name, she gives herself a free hand in creating her own version of her story for the knight's consumption. A short time later, in the House of Pride, she demonstrates once again her awareness of the power of storytelling -- an awareness which the Redcross knight, in choosing to rely exclusively on "swords" rather than "words" to defend himself against the charges made by Sansjoy (I.iv.41-2), shows that he does not share -- by taking pains to respond to the Saracen's interpretation of events with her own version of the story: a version which clears her own character of any wrongdoing while further degrading that of the Redcross knight (I.iv.47). Meanwhile, alongside her continuing use of storytelling to guide the development of events, Duessa also plays the part of guide in the more literal sense: thus, "To sinfull house of Pride, Duessa/ guides the faithfull knight" (I.iv.Arg -- "faithfull", in this instance, perhaps connoting 'credulous').

We have seen, then, that both Una and Duessa use storytelling, along with direct physical guidance, as a means of story-making; they tell versions of events which lead toward the fulfillment of the version which they propound. From the second to the seventh cantos, the knight, in effect, lives a story told by Duessa; from the eighth canto onward, he begins at last to live the story that was assigned to him when it was first told by Una at

Faery Court. Una begins to displace Duessa as the principal storyteller within the story when she first tells a version of how "False *Duessa.../* Mine onely foe, mine onely deadly dread" has "Inueigled" her knight "to follow her" (I.vii.50). In using Duessa's true name -- which Duessa herself has scrupulously avoided doing in her contact with the Redcross knight and even with his pagan adversaries (thus, she is "Fidessa" even to Sansjoy (I.iv.45, *etc.*)) -- Una seizes control of the interpretation of her adversary's character, and thereby of the story in which her knight has been involved as Duessa's champion.

Before Una's seizing of the initiative, however, there is a long period of wandering for both Redcross and Una, in which neither takes a critical attitude toward the knight's errant behaviour. Thus Una, for example, in mistakenly welcoming the disguised Archimago as her long-lost knight, repeats her earlier error (I.i.32-3) of accepting that the

> ...aduenture in strange place,
> Where *Archimago* said a felon strong
> To many knights did daily worke disgrace...
> (I.iii.29)

constitutes a legitimate diversion from the quest which he originally undertook on her behalf. The generous and forgiving nature which Una shows in accepting this explanation is usually read as an unequivocal sign of her

virtue, irrespective of the cruel irony to which this virtue is here the victim.[13] But in fact, her uncritical acceptance of "His louely words" is what makes her, once more, such an easy dupe for Archimago (I.iii.30).

Meanwhile, in Una's absence, the Redcross knight is showing himself to be an equally uncritical interpreter of his adventures, without even the excuse of the "true loue" that leads Una to assess his actions so generously (I.iii.30). First he accepts Duessa as a suitable replacement for the lady whom he has abandoned (I.ii.26-7), and before long he has also accepted Lucifera as a suitable substitute for Gloriana (I.v.16), all the while apparently convinced of his own gallantry and praiseworthiness. At the same time, however, it becomes increasingly apparent to an attentive reader that the knight is descending to a moral parity with the pagan adversaries against whom he strives so self-righteously. Thus, even in his early encounter with Sansfoy, the combatants are as alike to one another "As... two rams stird with ambitious pride" (I.ii.16); while by the time he fights Sansjoy, the motives of the adversaries are so indistinguishable that Redcross can comically suppose that Duessa's attempt to encourage his opponent with the promise of "the shield, and I, and all" is meant for himself (I.v.11-12).[14] The narrator may insist on a distinction between the Redcross knight and his challenger at the House of Pride -- claiming, first, that

the Saracen fights for "bloud and vengeance" and the Christian knight "for prayse and honour" (I.v.7), and then, repeatedly, that "th'one for wrong, the other striues for right" (I.v.8,9) -- but in their context, these assertions only intensify our awareness of the knight's self-delusion[15]: for not only is it the pursuit of "prayse and honour" which will lead him directly into the service of Lucifera[16], but even the desire for "blood and vengeance" which is attributed disparagingly to Sansjoy will appear more strikingly in the Redcross knight's own actions than in the pagan's behaviour, when, after Duessa has hidden the fallen Sansjoy in a "darkesome clowd" (I.v.13), the Redcross knight

> Not all so satisfide, with greedie eye
> ...sought all round about, his thirstie blade
> To bath in bloud of faithlesse enemy...
> (I.v.15).

As the gap widens between the reality of the Redcross knight's moral degeneracy and his strengthening impression of his own chivalric virtue, the narrator continues to play the part of the knight's apologist which he first assumed in the poem's opening episode -- as blind, apparently, to the implications of the story he is telling as the knight is to the reality of the story he is acting out. By this point, it has become clear that the voice which earlier assured us that the knight went forth after his victory over Errour "with God to

frend" is ready to describe even the most immoral behaviour as exemplary. What is more, as a result of this indiscriminate praise, the very allegorical process whereby moral precepts are derived from the narrative *exempla* has gone as far astray as the knight's self-righteous interpretation of his own actions, and is producing generalizations that are the victims of an ever greater and more conspicuous irony. The opening stanza of canto five has been rightly cited by various critics as the nadir of the narrator's reliability[17], even as, in the fifth canto generally, his praise for the errant knight becomes most insistent.

There are two principal respects in which the Redcross knight fails to understand the significance of his own adventures in the first half of Book One, which we might describe, respectively, as failure to listen and failure to observe. The many instances in which he fails to listen critically have been enumerated in a recent article by Richard Mallette. The most striking of these is his scarcely "busying.../ ...his dull eares, to heare" Duessa's initial account of herself (I.ii.26)[18]; but there are a number of others as well. For example, when Fradubio finishes telling the story which, properly interpreted, could warn the knight away from Duessa, he allows himself be distracted from the warning by her pretended swoon (I.ii.44-5), and appears never again to give it his thought[19]; while, in the House of Pride, he

"confirms his deepening insensitivity to the power of language" when he fails utterly to comprehend the relative power of "swords" and "words" in choosing to rely exclusively upon the former in defending himself against the story told about him by Sansjoy (I.iv.41-2).[20] Even as early as the fateful evening in Archimago's cell, he shows himself to be an uncritical listener, in failing to register anything amiss in the old man's stories "of Saintes and Popes", adoringly strewn with "an *Aue-Mary* after and before" (I.i.35) -- stories which would almost certainly have alerted an Elizabethan reader to the danger of his situation.[21]

A similar gap opens up between the perceptions of knight and reader with respect to his other failing, which I have called the failure to observe. Thus, when Redcross blithely travels by a "broad high way" (I.iv.2) to a house built "on a sandie hill" (I.iv.5), the signs of imminent disaster are clear for any reader who is familiar with the gospel according to Matthew.[22] Similarly, when he gallantly offers himself as a champion to Duessa, "A goodly Lady clad in scarlot red,/ Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay" (I.ii.13), even a passing familiarity with the book of Revelation, and the woman described therein as "araied in purple and skarlat, and guilded with golde, and precious stones, and pearles"[23], should be sufficient to warn the reader that the knight is in for trouble.

Now, I recognize that it is hardly something new to cite these New Testament allusions as aids to the reader's interpretation of the first book of The Faerie Queene; however, what is, I think, worth considering anew, is the precise status of these allusions with respect to the knight himself who so manifestly does not benefit from their presence in the text. For a critic of the school of Harry Berger or C. S. Lewis (see Introduction (2): pp. 132*ff*), these allusions might seem to be classic examples of the way in which allegory conveys information to the reader "over the head" of the characters in the story, for whom this information is, *in principle*, unavailable.[24] In such a reading, the Redcross knight's failure to recognize Duessa or the House of Pride for the evils that they are would be seen as ironies having to do, not with any particular interpretive failing on his part, but rather with the way that the poem itself functions in general. But we ought to consider two points which run counter to such a conclusion.

First, the details in the descriptions of Duessa and the House of Pride which allude to the New Testament are presented not "over the head" of the Redcross knight, but, rather, precisely as parts of the account *of what he sees*. So his situation in failing to recognize these evils is not comparable, for example, to his lagging behind the reader in learning that Duessa is "falshood" --

a fact which is indeed conveyed to the reader, initially, in a manner inaccessible to the knight (I.ii.Arg), and which is only made available to him later, when Una repeats it for his benefit (I.viii.49). Rather, the details in the passages in question become known to us, in the first place, only through a report of the knight's own experience.

Second, the knowledge of the New Testament which a reader requires in order to observe these allusions does not constitute a privileged frame of reference to which the characters in the story can have no access, but, rather, is the very knowledge which the Redcross knight must himself acquire in order to become fit for completing his quest (I.x.19). In fact, not only the New Testament in general, but the specific *details* of the New Testament of which the Redcross knight would have had to be aware, in order, for example, to have recognized his folly in allowing himself to be led to the House of Pride, are both *known* by certain characters in the world that he inhabits, and *applicable* by these characters to the specific situations in question. Thus Caelia, in pointing out to the knight the moral difference between "the broad high way" and "the narrow path" (I.x.10) refers both to the book which he will soon begin to study (specifically, to Matthew 7:13-14), and to the roads which have, in their world, a quite literal existence as well as a figurative meaning -- the former being the

"broad high way" (I.iv.2) that leads to destruction in the form of the House of Pride, and the latter the "narrow way" (I.x.35) which leads to life in the form of "the new *Hierusalem*" (I.x.57). Caelia understands the moral significance of following the various roads in Faery Land because, through her knowledge of the New Testament, she understands what they symbolize.

We may grasp much more tangibly the importance of the Redcross knight's learning, in the House of Holiness, how properly to interpret the Scriptures, if we see that this practical skill is precisely the thing that he lacked in his earlier adventures. Like Caelia, he must learn to read his adventures symbolically, in the light of the New Testament, if he is to understand what distinguishes his armour (Ephesians 6:13*ff*) and his quest (Revelation 20:2) from those of the ordinary "errant knight" (I.x.10). The primary significance of the New Testament allusions in Book One lies not, then, in any connections that the poem's readers may see them as authorizing between the imaginary world in the poem and the real world in which the poem was written -- as when they are made the basis of an allegory whose tenor is a Protestant version of English church history [25] -- but in the *exempla* which they provide, *within* the world of the narrative, of the practical importance of being able to apply a good knowledge of the Bible to the events in one's own life. In the Redcross knight's misadventures, we see the

consequences of an insufficient knowledge of Scripture and of the resulting inability to know the right and wrong in one's own experience; while in ourselves, conversely, insofar as we are able to anticipate the knight's woes, we see the usefulness of knowing the Bible. This is, certainly, a Protestant allegory: but less, I think, in the sense of representing, allegorically, a Protestant version of history (a history to which, in fact, the poem alludes only in the most general terms), than in the sense of being an allegory *for* Protestants -- that is, an allegory in which the Protestant emphasis on knowing the Bible gives one an unmistakable interpretive advantage, and which thereby exemplifies, for the reader who understands its clues, the practical rewards of a Protestant education.

Now, it may be objected to my reading of the knight's relation to the poem's Biblical allusions that the Redcross knight does in fact have a copy of the New Testament even before he reaches the House of Holiness, as is demonstrated by his making a present of it to Arthur (I.ix.19). It might be argued, on this basis, that his failure to notice the significance of Duessa and the House of Pride cannot be the result of a lack of Scriptural knowledge, but must rather be attributed to his having, in principle, (as Berger and Lewis have argued), a different relationship to the things in his experience than do the poem's readers. But his being

seen to possess a copy of the New Testament is less important to my argument than the fact that he clearly does not know how to *interpret* Scripture correctly until Fidelia teaches him how to do so (I.x.19*ff*). The Bible's power to save souls may be mentioned at its first appearance (I.ix.19); but only once the knight has been taught to read it properly do we see this power in action, when, in learning the lessons that Fidelia preaches from it, he begins to reflect upon the moral status of his past actions, and thereupon to repent of his sins (I.x.21).

The Legend of Holiness further dramatizes the indispensability of being able to draw upon a knowledge of the Bible in interpreting one's experiences, by presenting an imaginary world in which, unless one has access to the moral structure that is revealed in it through allusions to the Scriptures, good and evil are frequently, even regularly, indistinguishable from one another. Not only does evil typically disguise itself, in this world, under the semblance of good -- with Archimago, Duessa, the House of Pride, and the wandering wood, for example, all appearing under a superficially benevolent or otherwise "goodly" (I.ii.13, I.iv.5) aspect -- but, at the same time (though this has been noticed less commonly by critics), things in this world which are genuinely good frequently appear in forms which suggest evil. For instance, Arthur's physical description at his

first appearance in the poem is full of imagery and emotive words which could easily be mistaken for clues that he is a figure of evil: thus, for example, his helmet is described as "haughtie" and "horrid" ('haughtie', in particular, being a loaded word in a book wherein evil appears again and again as the sin of pride), and is shaped like a "Dragon", complete with "greedie pawes" and a "dreadfull hideous hed" and even a "scaly tayle" which recalls the long and dangerous tails that regularly adorn Spenser's monsters (I.vii.31; compare the tails of Errour, I.i.16-18, and of the dragon, I.xi.11ff); all this seems to associate him closely with the various evils in Una's experience, and in particular, with the dragon that has laid waste to her native land.[26] There is a comparably troubling quality to the first appearance of Fidelia, who comes forth initially bearing "a cup of gold,/.../In which a Serpent did himselfe enfold,/ That horrour made to all, that did behold" -- troubling not only because the serpent is frequently a sign of evil, or even because of the horrible aspect of this serpent in particular, but also because the cup itself is uncannily reminiscent of the "golden cup" recently borne by Duessa, whose contents were "Death and despeyre.../ And secret poyson" (I.viii.14); indeed, even the name "Fidelia" might be supposed to be a cause for concern, in that it is reminiscent of the name "Fidessa" by which that prior

cup-bearer was first known.[27]

The equivocal appearances of things in the world presented by the first book of The Faerie Queene pose a serious problem both for the characters who inhabit this world and for the poem's readers. Indeed, our own difficulties as readers are, if anything, exacerbated by the difficulties suffered by the characters, since, to a large degree, we see the world as it appears through their eyes, and therefore, to that degree, already (unreliably) interpreted. Only with reference to the absolute standard of the New Testament does it become possible, either for them or for us, to distinguish between true righteousness and the destructive self-righteousness that is fostered by pride. The sooner that they, and we, learn to rely on this standard alone, mistrusting all the other voices in the text that seem, superficially, to be authoritative, the sooner we will begin to see clearly the true nature of the path that their story follows. For Una and the Redcross knight, this revelation must wait until the second half of their adventures; for us, it is potentially available from the time when they leave the wandering wood, confidently and resolutely following the path that leads to destruction.

Important as it is that the Redcross knight's actions be judged against the absolute standard of Scripture, however, we should also note that, for the knight himself, acquiring the ability to assess rightly the

merits of his own actions is no more than an indispensable first step in a larger process, and one which, in isolation, leads to precisely the opposite of the desired result: that is, to the abandonment rather than to the completion of his quest. Thus, for example, in his training at the House of Holiness, when he comes to perceive truly the course his story has taken so far, this revelation leads, by itself, only to the "anguish" of recognizing his "sinfull guilt", and thereby to the despairing wish that he might "end his wretched dayes" (I.x.21). And when, subsequently, in his discussion with the hermit Contemplation, it is revealed to him that, by the absolute standards of heaven, his future actions no less than his past ones -- even including his actions in completing his quest -- themselves "can nought but sin, and... sorrowes yield" (I.x.60) because all undertakings in a fallen world are sinful, he once again expresses a yearning to withdraw from action in the world, if not through suicide then through the equally unacceptable alternative of monastic retirement (I.x.63).

Treated as an end in itself, rather than as a step in a larger process, such meditation on the inevitable gap between the standards of righteousness and the standards of one's own behaviour would lead nowhere but to a repetition of the temptation which the knight faces at the cave of Despair (I.ix.33*ff*). Actively directing the knight beyond such a meditation -- as Una actively saves

him from Despair -- is therefore as essential as making him capable of such self-criticism in the first place. The principle behind the required direction is also the same as that which Una seizes upon in saving her knight from Despair: namely, to refocus the knight's attention on the fact that he has been "chosen", and to admit consideration of the prospects of salvation or damnation only in relation to this fact (I.ix.53). Being "chosen" means, on one hand, being "chosen" by God for sainthood (I.x.57). But it also means being "chosen" to perform a task (I.ix.20), and this second sense is inseparable from the first: for, as the Palmer will observe, in speaking to the Redcross knight at the beginning of the second book, it is the

> ...hard atchieu'ment by you donne,
> For which enrolled is your glorious name
> In heauenly Registers aboue the Sunne,
> Where you a Saint with Saints your seat haue wonne...
>
> (II.i.32).

In other words, it is for slaying the dragon that he will be made a Saint -- which is to say, in effect, that God's choosing the Redcross knight for sainthood consists in His choosing him to be the one who will slay the dragon. The question of salvation or damnation for Redcross is therefore inseparable from the task of completing his quest; and all merely human judgements as to his moral worthiness must be subordinated to the effort to achieve

this goal. Even after his training in charitable works at the "holy Hospitall" (I.x.36), in which

> ...so perfect he became,
> That from the first vnto the last degree,
> His mortall life he learned had to frame
> In holy righteousnesse, without rebuke or blame...
>
> (I.x.45),

the Redcross knight must still acknowledge that he is "Vnworthy... of so great grace" as God has bestowed upon him in preparing for him a place "emongst the Saints" (I.x.62); Contemplation, responding to the knight's recognition of this fact, does not deny the knight's unworthiness, but rather observes, first, that those others "that haue... attaind" sainthood were themselves "in like cace" (I.x.62), and then insists, once again, on the necessity of the knight's returning to the quest which he has been chosen to perform (I.x.63). Salvation itself is not ultimately explicable in terms of good works or human desert; what *is* clear, however, is the task which God requires, of this elect knight, as the condition of his election: namely, that he complete that quest of which Una, after his return from Contemplation's cell, soon "gan him desire.../...mindfull for to bee" (I.x.68).

If, as I have argued, the Redcross knight's error in the earlier part of his story is that he does not realize that his knighthood and his quest have a figurative meaning pertaining to divine election and salvation, then

the opposite error, from which he must be dissuaded before he can proceed on his way from the House of Holiness at the end of the tenth canto, is to suppose that the knighthood and the quest have significance *only* with respect to this figurative meaning: that is, that he should not need to return to *literally* being a knight or performing a chivalric mission now that what these things symbolize has been revealed. Accordingly, the hermit Contemplation, in insisting that the knight must return "Backe to the world" and to the quest which he has left uncompleted (I.x.63), paradoxically must emphasize the very "earthly" nature of the task which he is still required to perform (I.x.60). As a spiritually-minded commentator on the poem's action, Contemplation is precisely the sort of figure whom we would expect to find spelling out the spiritual meanings of the dragon and the woman for whose sake the knight goes to slay it, as his innumerable predecessors, the hermits and abbots who guide the Grail knights in the Quest of the Holy Grail, might have done. But in fact, this hermit does not even mention, much less develop, a symbolic meaning for the Redcross knight's quest; on the contrary, he reduces the meaning of the mission to the most literal level possible, referring to his victory over the dragon as an "earthly conquest" (I.x.60), and describing the reason why he must fight the battle solely in terms of his promise, as a knight, "To aide a virgin

desolate foredonne" (I.x.60 -- compare I.x.63, "ne maist thou yit/ Forgo that royall maides bequeathed care,/ Who did her cause into thy hand commit..."). Even the Redcross shield which the Letter to Raleigh encourages us to see as "the shield of faith" (Ephesians 6:16) is here described as no more than a badge of chivalric prowess, to be left behind "emongst all knights" before he can take his place "emongst those Saints" who dwell in the New Jerusalem (I.x.60-1).

The only direct connection which Contemplation mentions between these "earthly" matters and those which are "heauenly" lies in the queen in whose service the knight has undertaken his mission: "For she is heauenly borne, and heauen may iustly vaunt" (I.x.59). She, Gloriana, is made the point of connection between purposes mortal and divine: in her "heauenly" pedigree lies the reason that, according to Contemplation, it "well beseemes all knights of noble name" to "haunt" her court in Cleopolis and "doen their seruice to that soueraigne Dame" (I.x.59). We may know that the Redcross knight's quest symbolizes the task of overcoming the "infernall feend" himself (I.i.5); but what Contemplation must emphasize is its justification as a literal and "earthly" chivalric endeavor, a justification which lies in its being assigned through God's delegate, the earthly city's "heauenly" queen. Such knighthood in service of a divinely-appointed ruler, quite apart from the symbolic

significance of the Redcross knight's particular quest, is quite different from mere knight-errantry; seeking "glorie" at such a court (I.x.59) is quite different from the mere pursuit of self-glorification. The Redcross knight, having learned to see, in relation to the true moral standards of heaven, the sinfulness of his own actions and the reason for his own story's having gone off course, must learn, next, that the way forward is still an earthly one, and that his earthly task lies in serving such a divinely-delegated authority and pursuing such glory at her court -- and this in spite of the fact that he has glimpsed a standard of life, in the heavenly city for which he is ultimately bound, which "does far surpas" the chivalric life of the city whose queen he must serve in this world (I.x.58).

It is in relation to this earthly task that the activities of interpretation and storytelling which Una takes over from Duessa in the seventh canto of Book One need to be understood. The end of such activities is not the disclosure of the 'whole truth' -- which, in a fallen world, would inevitably result in dwelling on one's own sinfulness to the exclusion of action -- but rather to keep events on track toward their divinely-sanctioned end. Accordingly, a recounting of past woes, as in the story which Una tells, at Arthur's encouragement, upon first meeting the prince (I.vii.38-52), is justifiable only insofar as it leads to a rectification of wrongs,

that is, to the resumption of the abandoned quest. When, after the knight's rescue from Orgoglio's dungeon, Una seems inclined to speak further of "these wrongs" (I.viii.43), Arthur intervenes, pointing out that "The things, that grieuous were to do, or beare,/ Them to renew, I wote, breeds no delight" (I.viii.44). It is particularly worth noting, I think, that Arthur does not think it necessary to establish whether or not Redcross is responsible for his own miseries (that is, whether the course of events that has left the knight in this state consisted of things that were "grieuous... to do" or merely "grieuous... to... beare"); rather, he prefers to concentrate on exposing the true nature of "that wicked woman", Duessa, who has been the knight's companion through most of these events, and to name her as "The roote of all your care, and wretched plight" (I.viii.45). Such an assessment may be less penetratingly accurate than that of Despair, who will justifiably tell the knight that

> Thou falsed hast thy faith with periurie,
> And sold thy selfe to serue *Duessa* vilde,
> With whom in all abuse thou hast thy selfe defilde...
>
> (I.ix.46);

but it is also manifestly more conducive to the knight's putting his mistakes behind him and getting on with the important business of his quest.

The purpose of storytelling, as Arthur practises it,

is not the indiscriminate recollection of the past, but rather the recalling of what advances a worthy cause; it is an activity justified by its goal. Even when the prince himself is prevailed upon to tell his story, he treats his own recitation as something functional, in relation to his own quest, much as the story that he had requested of Una has proven functional with respect to hers: for in recounting his past and how he has come to be in Faery Land, he stirs in himself a "fresh desire his voyage to pursew" (I.ix.18) -- a desire upon which he proceeds almost immediately to act (I.ix.20). Such a pragmatic relation to storytelling epitomizes the right use of this activity in a fallen world where there are clear goals to be achieved in spite of the inevitable imperfection of those who are to achieve them. After Arthur's departure, Una follows his good example: at the cave of Despair, and subsequently, her activity as a storyteller is virtually synonymous with her new role as the Redcross knight's guide, as she reminds him repeatedly of the story which he is meant to be acting out on her behalf (I.ix.52, I.x.68, I.xi.1-2).

Arthur's passing lightly over the Redcross knight's own responsibility for his downfall with a clear view to forwarding his quest must be distinguished from the mere playing the part of the knight's apologist without any such view to a larger goal, as was done by Una and the poem's narrator during the course of the knight's

straying from the proper course of his story. Giving a generous interpretation of events is not wrong in itself: on the contrary, devising "each... others prayse.../ How to aduaunce with fauourable hands" is a significant part of what knights who are "allyed.../ In braue poursuit of cheualrous emprize" can do for one another (I.ix.1). Indeed, there is a telling ambiguity in the notion of 'advancing one another's praises', which appears to mean both interpreting one another's deeds favourably and helping one another to accomplish such deeds as are susceptible of favourable interpretation: for being sympathetically interpreted (as is shown in Arthur's relation with the Redcross knight) can itself help one on one's way to the accomplishing of good deeds.

The alliance of Arthur with Una and the Redcross knight in the ninth canto of Book One is the first of a series of such leagues which are formed among The Faerie Queene's principal characters in their encounters with one another throughout the poem. Such alliances recognize the community of interests that good people share and that they can help one another to advance, whether through deeds in one another's aid or (more commonly) through reciprocally beneficial words. Una introduces the notion of reciprocal benefit when she requests of Arthur that, before they part ways, he should

> ...his name and nation tell;
> Least so great good, as he for her had wrought,

Should die vnknown, and buried be in thanklesse thought.
(I.ix.2).

Once Arthur has complied with her wish, she promptly demonstrates the beneficial use to which she shall put this knowledge of her benefactor, by singing the praises of his quest for the Faery Queen, and thereby helping him to transform the pain of recollected passion (I.ix.16) into a renewed motivation for his undertaking (I.ix.18). The Redcross knight promptly follows her example, by praising both Una, for her steadfast devotion to himself, and Arthur, for his worthiness of winning the Faery Queen's grace (I.ix.17). The feeling, on their parting to perform their separate missions, is that the exchange of praise has sent them on their way with a revitalized sense of purpose (I.ix.20).

The focal point for the various alliances of mutual encouragement which help to spur The Faerie Queene's knights on their way is the court of the Faery Queen, where individual acts of "prayse" (I.ix.1) can be converted into a place "in th'immortall booke of fame" (I.x.59). This "immortall booke of fame", while never actually identified with "the boke of life" (Revelation 20:12) into which the names of God's elect are written, seems to be closely associated with that other (in a sense more truly "immortall") book, through the congruence of human and divine purposes in the "heauenly"

authority of Gloriana (I.x.59). Thus, for example, the Palmer will wish upon the Redcross knight the "euerlasting fame" which is conferred at "Faerie court", apparently as an earthly correlate to what the knight has already been granted by God, namely his having had his "glorious name" written "In heauenly Registers aboue the Sunne,/ Where you a Saint with Saints your seat haue wonne" (II.i.31-2). It is, apparently, because of this association between the "euerlasting fame" conferred at Gloriana's court and the eternal blessedness conferred by God, that Contemplation can speak of the former as an appropriate "earthly" goal for those who aim ultimately at the latter (I.x.59).

Now, if wishing to have one's name and deeds written in "th'immortall booke of fame" is a legitimate spur toward undertaking the action which God prescribes for his elect on earth, then the kind of favourable storytelling that can help to advance a quest while it is in progress also has a legitimate place after the quest's completion: for fame consists in a favourable interpretation of one's deeds after the fact, revived by acts of storytelling as often as is necessary to prevent their being forgotten; and the *hope* of fame -- which is what actually constitutes the spur to action in question -- resides in the existence of a community of the "chosen" which is committed to such favourable reception of its members' successes.

This, I think, is the context in which we can understand the significance of the events in the twelfth canto of the Legend of Holiness. As the very existence of this final canto attests, the story has not yet been brought to its conclusion with the knight's victory over the dragon. Rather, just as Duessa's and Una's acts of storytelling have had an impact on the directions that the story itself has taken during the course of the knight's quest, so now their respective versions of that story must compete to determine the form in which the completed quest will be received and enshrined in memory.

It is here, at the very end of his legend, that we see the Redcross knight becoming involved for the first time in telling his own story. Not only does he politely accede to the request of Una's father that he recount his adventures (I.xii.15), but in marked contrast to his earlier preference for using "swords" rather than "words" in defending himself against slander, he takes pains to respond to the version of events offered by Archimago and Duessa (I.xii.26-8) with his own version of the same incidents (I.xii.31-2). Now, to this extent, the knight's storytelling is amenable to a straightforward interpretation, in that the capacity to explain his own story might be seen as the prerequisite of the ability, which he will demonstrate in the first canto of Book Two, to act as his own guide once separated from Una, and thus to keep himself on track despite Archimago's attempts

once again to distract him from his course (II.i.4-5). But there is an aspect of the knight's newfound facility as a storyteller which is, at least superficially, considerably more problematic. For, pressed to explain his dalliance with Duessa, the knight seems far too generous to himself in attributing his deception at her hands to "her wicked arts, and wylie skill,/ Too false and strong for earthly skill or might" (I.xii.32) -- as if, in the event, he had displayed the kind of strength against which only mighty sorcery could ever have prevailed. In fact, as we have seen, Duessa did not need to cast a spell over the knight: he was quite ready, without her having to resort to such means, to believe whatever story she told him, and to champion whatever cause she named, because in the first place he had such a poor grasp of the nature of his own proper story, and so little clear commitment to the cause which he was originally meant to champion. Moreover, much of his questionable behaviour during his time with Duessa -- let us take, for example, his obeisance to Lucifera upon winning the duel against Sansjoy (I.v.16) -- had been at his own initiative, and at most indirectly occasioned by any deception on Duessa's part. (We may compare the version of his story that he offers here to the more honest appraisal which he makes in the House of Holiness of his own responsibility for his woes (I.x.21ff), as well as to Despair's pointedly accurate summary of his

sins (I.ix.46)). Finally, the knight offers even this manipulated account of his truancy with Duessa only when he is specifically required by Una's father to answer the charges levelled against him by Archimago (I.xii.30); prior to this, it seems (I.xii.15), he had contrived to tell the story of his adventures without any reference to his having taken another lady as his companion. Hamilton suggests, with respect to the knight's "omission of any reference to Duessa in his 'point to point' account of his 'straunge adventures, and of perils sad'", that "Even the memory of his sin seems to have been purged in the house of Holiness until he is now reminded"[29]; but this is as over-generous to the knight as the knight appears to be to himself. There is nothing in this story, (equivalent to Dante's crossing of Lethe in the Purgatorio, which is perhaps what Hamilton has in mind[30]), to suggest that the temporary forgetting of his sin has any part in the Redcross knight's purification; besides, had he really forgotten all his sins, as Hamilton suggests, it is hard to imagine what he would have had left to tell of his adventures. The fact that those who listen to his initial account of events

> ...did lament his lucklesse state,
> And often blame the too importune fate,
> That heapd on him so many wrathfull wreakes:
> For neuer gentle knight, as he of late,
> So tossed was in fortunes cruell freakes...
>
> (I.xii.16),

seems to indicate that he has told them *some* version of his misadventures in the House of Pride and the dungeon of Orgoglio, but one in which he has managed to leave out his amorous dalliance with Duessa, and in which (as with his subsequent account of Duessa herself) he has described himself entirely as the victim of external evils, as if his own errors had not precipitated his fall. As for another suggestion of Hamilton's, that the inaccuracy of his account is indicative of the fact "that the Knight is not yet wedded to Truth"[3], this too fails when put to the test; for after his wedding to Una (I.xii.36-41), we find him, if anything, more prone than ever to be more generous to himself than the objective facts of his quest warrant. Where, for example, is the acknowledgement of his sins in his (superficially humble) declaration to Guyon and the Palmer that "all I did, I did but as I ought" (II.i.33)? In sum, it seems that, in order to defend himself against falsehood, the knight has learned not so much to articulate the truth, as to present a version of events which shows him in the best possible light.

Of course, there is *some* truth in the versions of his story which the Redcross knight tells about himself. But this is hardly a ringing endorsement of the version of events with which he combats the allegations of Archimago and Duessa, particularly in view of the fact that these allegations themselves are not out-and-out lies, but like

his own story contain some truth. For example, while it is, of course, pure hypocrisy on Duessa's part to claim that it was the knight who forsook her (I.xii.26; for the facts of the matter, see I.vii.14-16), nevertheless, the substance of her charge against him, namely that "he already plighted his right hand/ Vnto another loue" (I.xii.26), is, if not true, at least close enough to the truth that we cannot absolutely gainsay it -- and nor, for that matter, does the knight himself try to gainsay it, but rather pleads that, whatever he did, it was under a compulsion "Too false and strong for earthly skill or might" (I.xii.32).

Rather than a clear-cut case of truth versus falsehood, then, the contest between the Redcross knight and his enemies comes to look like a standoff between two manifestly biased and self-interested versions of the story. So the fact that the knight's version is accepted in the end does not furnish us, as we might have expected, with an *exemplum* of truth's proving itself against falsehood. Indeed, if we look at the matter closely, we shall see that the acceptance of the knight's version of events has nothing at all to do with the merits of his case, nor with the flaws of the case presented by his rivals. It is, rather, the messenger himself, and not the case which he presents, that is thrown out of court: once he is recognized by Una as Archimago (I.xii.34) -- one whom she knows, by her own

experience, to be her bitter enemy (I.iii.40) -- and denounced as "The falsest man aliue" (I.xii.34) by her, the sole daughter and heir of the presiding judge, there can be no further question of listening to the merits of his version of the story. Instead, he is thrown immediately into prison (I.xii.35-6), and the whole debate occasioned by his appearance is set aside as if forgotten, leaving the knight's version of events not so much adjudged to be true as allowed, once again, to stand uncontested.

The apparent fact that the Redcross knight is economical with the truth in relating his own adventures is generally not mentioned by the poem's commentators, or if mentioned, is not allowed to disturb the general picture which the poem presents of a knight who is now so perfected in his virtue as to merit being called a living saint (II.i.32). But surely we ought not to dismiss so lightly a case in which the character whom we are led to see as the very paragon of the virtue celebrated by the book shows a manifest bias in his own interpretation of his story. Crudely put, if we cannot trust the Redcross knight, even after his purification in the House of Holiness and his victory over the dragon, to give us a true and objective account of the story, then whom *can* we trust? Rather than passing lightly, in view of his declared saintliness, over his unreliable rendering of his own story, might we not equally well question, in

turn, the reliability of the very declaration that he *is* "a Saint" (II.i.32)? Or what reason could we give for supposing that the Palmer, who makes this declaration, is a more reliable interpreter of the world than is the knight himself?

The reason, perhaps, why these questions are not ordinarily pressed, is that they could easily lead to a forced and unsatisfactory reading of the poem as morally relativistic. We must keep in mind, after all, that this is the story of "Saint *George*", the "frend/ And Patrone.../ ...of mery England" (I.x.61), told as a moral allegory portraying the virtue of holiness; to propose, then, that such a plan were executed in a spirit of moral relativism, and that the saint were not to be seen as a saint, except in his own eyes and the eyes of his allies from Gloriana's court, would be to posit a deeply cynical Spenser. And however strange are these developments in the final canto of the first book, they are not such as to convince a reader that there is a deep authorial cynicism at work here, undercutting the very plan of the poem. (Some recent critics have seen a complete authorial undercutting of the virtue of the *second* book, and at least one critic, extrapolating from such a reading of the second book, has even described such ironic undercutting of the poem's ostensible purpose as typical of <u>The Faerie Queene</u> as a whole; but no one, so far as I am aware, has actually sustained a similar

reading 'against the grain' of Book One and its proclaimed celebration of the virtue of Holiness.[32]) But neither should we insist, against such evidence as we see in the final canto of Book One, upon seeing the imaginary world of The Faerie Queene as analogous, ethically, to the naive world of folk tale and popular legend, such as would have characterized Spenser's sources for the story of Saint George, wherein the question whether the good are really good and the bad really bad is never even raised and never needs to be contemplated. On the contrary, as we have seen, it is the "earthly" condition of the Redcross knight's quest, and the inevitable failure of its protagonist to live up to an absolute standard of good, which the poem emphasizes.

What we see, I think, in the contest over the final interpretation of the knight's story, is not a case of truth's proving itself against falsehood, but rather the forcible establishment, by a virtuous community, of a version of the truth which promotes the right interests, against a version of the same truth which perverts those interests and promotes the wrong ones in their place. In agreeing to a version of the Redcross knight's story which is substantially identical to the one which Arthur proposed (I.viii.44-5) in order to get that story back on track -- a version which passes lightly over the question of the knight's own responsibility for his misadventures in favour of an emphasis on the malicious influence of

Duessa -- the community gathered at the end of Book One to celebrate the knight's victory recognizes the continuing importance, even after the quest's completion, of focusing on the achievement of its final goal. A sinner the Redcross knight may be: but then, which of the saints was not "in like cace" in earthly life (I.x.62)? If the knight's personal history is not so unblemished as to set him above the reach of malicious detractors, he has nevertheless proven himself, in the end, loyal to the "virgin desolate foredonne" (I.x.60) who "did her cause into [his] hand commit" (I.x.63), and loyal, too, to the "heauenly borne" queen (I.x.59) under whose authority he undertook his quest. If he is to receive the earthly "fame" and "glorie" (I.x.59) that he now merits, the right points must be emphasized: his actions must be represented with a favourable emphasis, both by himself, and by his friends -- those in the kingdom he has delivered (I.xii.33-4), and subsequently, those from "Faerie court" (II.i.31-2).

By the time that Una steps forward to defend her knight from the (partially true) charges made against him in her father's house, we have come, in a sense, full circle from her early inclination to overlook any wrong in her knight's behaviour, so long as he returns to her in the end (I.iii.30); only now, her defense of her champion is tempered with a clear critical awareness of the difference between her friends and her enemies, and

in particular, of the falseness of the appearances behind which "*Archimago.../* The falsest man aliue" hides his malicious intent (I.xii.34).

Another character whose changing role in the first book of The Faerie Queene is best understood with reference to the legitimacy of the human desire to be enrolled in "th'immortall booke of fame" is the poem's imaginary narrator. To this point, I have spoken only critically of this character, describing him as a manifestly unreliable interpreter and a shameless and increasingly ridiculous apologist for the Redcross knight's misadventures in the first half of the Legend of Holiness. But just as Una's initially uncritical praise of her straying knight gives way, after their reunion, to a praise which is based in a critical awareness of her own interests, so too the narrator's relation to the knight, while remaining partisan to the end, is reformed in the second half of his rendition.

That the narrator does continue to play the part of the knight's apologist to the very end may be seen from the way in which he presents the events of the twelfth canto. It is only in retrospect, after Archimago appears to insist on the knight's blameworthiness, that we are able to infer that the knight's own initial account of his adventures must have omitted all mention of having taken Duessa as his companion: for, at the time, the narrator had glanced over this fact, telling us instead,

quite wrongly, that Redcross "From point to point, as is before exprest,/ Discourst his voyage long, according his request" (I.xii.15). This appeal to his own previous rendition is doubly disingenuous: for not only does it conveniently ignore the fact that the knight has *not* told a version in which his dalliance with Duessa figures, but it suggests that his own narratorial account of events has itself been the transparently objective version of the story that a candid recitation would ideally repeat, when we know that the narrator himself has been, at times, as wayward as the knight himself in the interpretation of the knight's adventures.

That there may be a legitimate purpose to the kind of partisanship which the narrator shows toward the Redcross knight in the twelfth canto -- if not, assuredly, to the kind which he showed in the first six -- may be seen, I think, if we consider the narrator's declared status as a "Poet historical" (Letter to Raleigh). (I take the role of "Poet historical" to characterize Spenser's fictional persona within the poem, rather than Spenser himself, because it is chiefly from the perspective of this persona that the events of the poem are understood to be historical.) The way in which the narrator of The Faerie Queene conceives of his role may be seen from the fact that he explicitly presents himself, not as a disinterested reporter of past events, but as one, rather, who aims to revive the fame of the good knights

and ladies of a former age (I.Pr.1). He voices the same intention, with respect to the Redcross knight in particular, as the knight enters into his fight with the dragon (I.xi.5-7). What is more, in claiming that he derives his version of events from "antique rolles" kept in the Muse's "euerlasting scryne" (I.Pr.2), he seems to suggest that he is using as his source the very "immortall booke of fame" in which Gloriana's knights "couet.../ To be eternized" (I.x.59). In reawakening their "prayses" that have "slept in silence long" (I.Pr.1), he is, in effect, using their own records of their deeds for the very purpose which they were originally intended, and so participating in the fulfillment of that hope of "euerlasting fame" (II.i.32) which helped to spur them toward undertaking their virtuous actions in the first place. To this extent, his partisan stance becomes comprehensible as a declaration of his own participation in the community of virtuous interests to which the characters who strive for glory at Faery Court belong.

A further understanding of the role into which the narrator of the Legend of Holiness matures by its twelfth canto may be gleaned from a glance at sixteenth-century expectations of 'historical poetry' (a broad category which included most of the works that the Letter to Raleigh cites as precedents for The Faerie Queene, among them not only the classical and romance epics but also

certain prose works such as Xenophon's Cyropaedia [33]), and of reports of the past more generally. On one hand, the poet's approach to history was conventionally contrasted with that of the historian proper, or what the Letter to Raleigh calls the "Historiographer": historiography, it was said, "helpeth not itself with any other thing but the plaine truth", whereas poetry "doth commonly inrich things by commending them above the starrs and their deserving".[34] On the other hand, the stories of the poets remained significant sources for the historiographers themselves, who had as yet no truly distinct version of history from that of the poets, so that while they might, for example, express skepticism about the traditions that traced the beginnings of the European nations to the fall of Troy, there was as yet no clear and well-developed alternative to them; consequently, Homer's epics themselves remained as much a cornerstone of the historical as of the poetic tradition.[35] The resulting paradox was to be expressed by Thomas Heywood, who observes, in his Troia Britanica (1609), that, on one hand, the Homeric epics were the principal source on which we rely for our knowledge of events whose memory "else long since had perisht" (viii.6)[36], but that, on the other hand, these poems might easily reflect nothing but the poet's own, possibly whimsical biases:

> ...had great *Homer* pleasd
> *Penelop* had beene wanton, *Hellen* chast...
> *Thersites* had the Imperiall Scepter ceasd,
> And *Agamemnon* in his rancke beene plast...
>
> (viii.7).

Heywood goes so far as to imagine what, for all we know, the reality might have been underlying Homer's very different account of the events:

> *Achilles*, durst not looke on *Hector* when
> He guld his Siluer armes in Greekish bloud,
> *Homer* that lou'd him more then other men,
> Gaue him such hart, that he gainst *Hector* stood...
>
> Twas Poesy that made *Achilles* bold,
> Stout *Aiax*, valiant, and *Vlisses* wise,
> By Homer's guift the great *Alcide* contrould
> The hoast of *Greekes*: all such as highly prise
> The sacred Muse, their names are writ in gold,
> *Thersites* was well featur'd, but denyes
> The Muse her honor, therefore to his shame,
> The Muse hath made him *Stigmaticke* and lame.
>
> (viii.8-9).

In sum, historical poetry was thought of, on one hand, as a kind of record of the past, but as a kind, on the other hand, which could virtually be defined in terms of its non-objectivity. What justified the writing and reading of such poetry -- and, indeed, of other sorts of history to the extent that they relied upon poetic or otherwise suspect sources -- could not be any claim to descriptive accuracy. Rather, the justification which was ordinarily offered on behalf of both historical poetry and historiography was that they encouraged virtue and discouraged

vice, and this in two ways: first, through the lessons and the inspiration that examples from the past could provide for those who read about them; and second, through the readers' consideration that they in their turn would be lauded or vilified by future histories (poetical or otherwise) and by the future generations who read them, depending on whether they had lived well or badly.[37]

Judged, then, by the standards of the time, the partiality of Spenser's narrator toward his heroes does not sit strangely with his supposed role as an historical reporter of the deeds in question, for what he ultimately achieves through this partiality is an instance of historical poetry's ethical function: he shows us that the virtuous, like the Redcross knight, will be treated generously by history, and that their legitimate desire to be remembered well, which helps to motivate them toward virtuous action in the first place, will be fulfilled by the writers of later ages.

We may compare the two moral poles of the narrator's approach to storytelling within the first book of The Faerie Queene -- initially, as an aimless apologist for an errant and sinful knight, and latterly, as a purposeful apologist for the redeemed and devoted knight -- to roles distinguished in the discussion of poetry in Spenser's View of the Present State of Ireland. Both speakers in this dialogue agree that, so long as it is the genuinely virtuous whom storytellers set about

celebrating, it is quite proper for them to use whatever poetical devices they have at their command "to beautify and adorn" these people's virtue; the problem arises, according to the character Irenius, only when these same devises are "abused", and turned improperly "to the gracing of wickedness and vice".[38] Spenser here shows himself to be well aware that, in granting a reporter of history 'poetic license' in expressing the facts, one grants him also the power to make what is virtuous appear bad and what is vicious appear good; but this leads to an argument, not for denying this license to reporters of history, but for reforming the practices which lead to abuse of the license, as for example the practice whereby (as Irenius testifies) the Irish bards will write poems in celebration of robbers in return for a share of the stolen goods.[39] Presumably, if storytellers are weaned from such base motives, and turned instead toward their proper end, that of praising the truly virtuous, then the danger of perverse and perverting representations of the past will disappear without poets and historians having to be denied a generous partisan interest in the good deeds of the heroes whom they celebrate. This is important, because, for Spenser, the proper interests of hero and storyteller are inseparably bound up together. The storyteller's primary goal must be -- and be seen to be -- not objective accuracy in the reporting of events, but the fulfilling of that legitimate desire for good

report which is so important in motivating the hero to undertake virtuous actions in the first place; for only thus will the ethical aim of storytelling be fulfilled, which is that the listeners be "stirred up to affect like commendations, and so to strive unto the like deserts".[40]

It may be appropriate at this point to respond to the readings of both The Faerie Queene and the View of the Present State of Ireland which have been advanced, in a recent book, by Annabel Patterson. Patterson argues that, in both of these works, the representation of the Elizabethan regime as an absolute good, and of its enemies as absolute evils, is ironic; and that, so far as it was possible for him to do so in a state which punished seditious writing harshly, Spenser indicates that beneath the moral absolutes of official propaganda, to which his texts superficially contribute, there lies a more fundamental and less moral truth -- what Patterson calls "the naked realities of opposed interests and unequal power relations".[41] Now, no doubt Patterson is right in the importance which she attributes to the fact that Spenser lived in a society where it was not possible, or at least not safe, to publish much of what one might have believed or suspected to be true.[42] Nor, as I think my exposition of the Redcross knight's early adventures will have made clear (see esp. pp. 167-9), would I argue with the claim that Spenser calls to a sensitive reader's attention the possibility of moral

relativism lurking behind apparent absolutes of good and evil. Nevertheless, it seems to me that, whatever Spenser may have believed privately, in the writings that we have been discussing it is moral relativism, rather than the belief in absolute standards of good and evil, which he presents as the superficial point of view that must be stripped away in order to apprehend truly "the naked realities" of moral action in the world -- a superficial point of view, moreover, which actually serves those who would work against truly good interests.

To see what I mean by this, let us return to the fifth canto of Book One, where, as I have observed, the Redcross knight's self-righteous behaviour and the narrator's interpretation of him as *genuinely* righteous conceal the knight's having descended to a wretched moral parity with his "faithlesse foe" (I.v.Arg). If there is an episode in Book One wherein moral absolutism appears to be the superficial doctrine and moral relativism the underlying reality, then this is surely it, as a brief examination of the canto will show.

The superficiality of moralization in the House of Pride episode is indicated not only (as I have already argued) through increasingly conspicuous irony at the expense of the knight's and narrator's moral interpretations of the action, but also through the presence, at Lucifera's court, of "many Bardes, that to the trembling chord/ Can tune their timely voyces cunningly,/ And many

Chroniclers" who make it their business, as if in direct rivalry with those who compose "th'immortall booke of fame" at the court of Gloriana (I.x.59), to "record/ Old loues, and warres for Ladies doen by many a Lord"(I.v.3). No doubt the likes of these, committed as they appear to be to the conventional values of secular knight-errantry, would (like the narrator and the knight himself) see the Redcross knight's battling for the sake of Duessa as a valiant undertaking. At the very least, the presence of these storytellers in the House of Pride indicates that, in the world presented by the poem, history and fame are made not only at Faery court, but in many places and in the service of many different interests, and that one court's fame might be another's infamy and vice versa. Taken by itself, this fact might seem to relativize vice and virtue, reducing them to nothing more than reputations contingent upon the interests of the particular poems or chronicles wherein they are enshrined; and it might seem, on this basis, as though the knight's seeking a good name at the House of Pride rather than, as he did originally, at Gloriana's court (I.i.3), is no more than a matter of his choosing to play for a good reputation according to a somewhat different set of house rules.

Moreover, as the fifth canto continues, it begins to seem that, not only with respect to earthly fame, but at a cosmic level as well, the absolute distinctions between good and evil as maintained by the poem's narrator are

revealing themselves to be mere covers for a deeper moral relativism. After the battle between Redcross and Sansjoy, the narrator follows Duessa on a journey to the underworld, undertaken for the purpose of healing the mortally wounded pagan knight. It is the first time that we see Duessa as part of a cause larger than herself. She is still seen as evil, but she is no longer presented as indiscriminately evil, that is, as having an equally ill will to one and all. On the contrary, she treats the goddess Night (I.v.20ff), and all "*Nightes* children" (I.v.23), including the fallen Sansjoy, as her allies, and seeks to advance their cause against "the children of faire light" (I.v.24), who include the Redcross knight. From the point of view of Night and her partisans, this cause has a certain righteousness, notwithstanding it is the cause "Of falshood" (I.v.27). In addressing Night as "most auncient Grandmother of all/ More old then *Ioue*, whom thou at first didst breede" (I.v.22), Duessa seems to imply Night's superior claim to the throne which Jove occupies as a usurper, and to suggest that, although Jove may have the *power* to enforce his bias towards "The sonnes of Day" (I.v.25), he has not the *right* to do so: for the "eternall seat" to which is attached "the chayne of strong necessitee" (I.v.25) should, by right, belong to the Titanic forces from which Jove has usurped it. In her turn, Night shows a certain self-righteousness in her determination to rebel, as far as possible, against

Jove's dispensation, and to see at least that "he the man that made *Sansfoy* to fall,/ Shall with his owne bloud price that he hath spilt" (I.v.26).

Now, so far, all this is not especially unsettling: there are innumerable precedents for the forces of evil being depicted as a united front working together against the forces of good; and the fact that, among themselves, they should represent their cause as a just one is perhaps to be expected as well. What does appear dangerous to the moral absolutism of the poem is that the merits of their case, at least in their immediate context, are rather surprisingly difficult to dismiss. The idea that Jove is a usurper and a tyrant, clinging brutally to a power that is not his by right, is at least as old as Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound[43]; and Spenser's wrathful, "thundring *Ioue*" (I.v.42) -- who has "thrust" Aesculapius "vnto hell... aliue", apparently from no better motive than fear that the man's "wondrous science.../...that could the dead reuiue" represents a challenge to his own authority over life and death (I.v.40) -- looks very much the tyrant described by Aeschylus' Prometheus. This sense of Jove's tyranny is bolstered by Spenser's having placed this description of hell in juxtaposition with the "dongeon deepe" beneath the house of Pride (I.v.45), and by his strongly suggesting their similarity in more than one respect (imprisonment in hell is "remedilesse" (I.v.36),

Lucifera's dungeon "mercilesse" (I.v.46), and both are places of internment for the dead of former ages, including, amongst their complements, many figures from the pagan classical world (I.v.35, 49-50)); for if we ask whose role, with respect to hell, corresponds to Lucifera's role in the House of Pride, then the answer must be that Jove is the master of that house of which hell is the dungeon. Indeed, Lucifera herself is pleased to think of herself as Jove's delegate on earth, so long as, in doing so, she aligns herself with the most powerful party (I.iv.11). An even more explicit analogy is made between the hell of the fifth canto and the "Dongeon deepe" (I.vii.15) in which the Redcross knight is eventually imprisoned: this dungeon is actually compared to hell (I.viii.39); and the knight's case, like Aesculapius's (I.v.36), is described as "Remedilesse" (I.vii.51). Once again, the figure in the analogy who corresponds to Jove is a brutal and evil tyrant; and in this case, the giant Orgoglio's likeness to Jove is further suggested by a simile which compares the giant's assault with his club to Jove's casting of the thunderbolt (I.viii.9).

All this combines to create a very strong sense of Jove as a tyrannical ruler, and lends credence to the idea voiced by Duessa and by the goddess Night that their struggle against his oppression is a just one, or at the very least, gives the impression that Jove is no better

than themselves. Consequently, so long as nothing enters the poem to question the assertion made by Duessa and Night that it is the pagan god Jove who is the patron of the Redcross knight, a morally relativistic reading of the action seems increasingly inevitable. The contest between the forces of Night, who "in hell and heauen had power equally" (I.v.34), and of Jove, "that rules both night and day" (I.v.42), comes to look not so much like a confrontation between good and evil as a naked power struggle between two self-interested parties, each laying claim to the other's territory -- or what Patterson calls "the naked realities of opposed interests and unequal power relations".

But the threat of a breakdown, into moral relativism, of the distinction between good and evil, although it is very real at this point in the legend, is overcome as the story continues. In particular, the morally bleak picture presented in the fifth canto improves enormously once it begins to emerge that not the pagan Jove but the Christian God is the Redcross knight's real patron, and that the former is not an adequate representation of the latter. Thus, no sooner has Una lamented that in Orgoglio's dungeon the Redcross knight, like Aesculapius in hell, is held "Remedilesse, for aie" (I.vii.51) than Prince Arthur breaks the analogy by promising her that he will "acquit your captiue knight" (I.vii.52). In the episode that follows, there is a direct contrast between

the association of Jove with the knight's captor (I.viii.9), and of the Christian God with his rescuer (I.viii.21).[44] No longer are we led to imagine, as we were in the fifth canto, that in the world of The Faerie Queene, Jove is identical with the Christian God; for where Jove condemns, the Christian God can also redeem -- Christian redemption being a theme which will be prevalent through the remainder of the legend of holiness. When Redcross, parting from Arthur, gives him the gift of "his Saueours testament/.../ A worke of wondrous grace, and able soules to saue" (I.ix.19), the distinction is clear between his God and the merciless Jove whom Duessa and Night had regarded as his patron. Soon afterward, an objective distinction is drawn between the fame which can be achieved at the court of Gloriana and that which is available in the House of Pride: for whereas Lucifera's bards and chroniclers serve a queen without any "heritage of natiue soueraintie", who "did vsurpe with wrong and tyrannie/ Vpon the scepter, which she now did hold" (I.iv.12), and even whose false claim to legitimacy is as the daughter of "thundring *Ioue*" (I.iv.11), a god who is himself a usurper, the compilers at Faery court of "th'immortall booke of fame" are assured of serving the true Christian God's purposes by virtue of Gloriana's being genuinely "heauenly borne" (I.x.59). What appeared, within the House of Pride itself, to be merely an *alternative* basis of earthly

fame, is now revealed to be a *wayward* one in relation to an objective standard. The Redcross knight himself, who previously had been content to seek fame at a court which claimed its legitimacy from Jove, now sees, for the first time, the absolute moral distinction between such a court and that of a truly legitimate Christian queen.

As far as the first book is concerned, then, the spectre of moral relativism is banished as the knight himself is first rescued from sin by "heauenly grace" (I.viii.1) and then taught to see the Christian God's purposes in the fallen world. Hereafter, the narrator will not praise the knight for his sinful behaviour, as he so inappropriately does during the knight's adventures in the House of Pride; nevertheless, the narration will remain legitimately partial to the knight, as the knight himself will prove a legitimate apologist for his own cause.

Such a combination as I have argued for, in the first book of The Faerie Queene, of moral absolutism with a pragmatic recognition of the inevitable imperfection of those who pursue good ends, seems to me a not implausible rendering of views that Spenser might have held 'in real life', and one 'between the lines' of which we should not necessarily expect to find a more subversive agenda -- especially should we allow that a genuinely celebratory intention need not be incompatible with elements of criticism, if this criticism is loyally intended as part

of the project of directing events toward their proper goals.[45] In particular, the Redcross knight's position in the twelfth canto of Book One, as a loyal subject who merits preferment at court but whose personal history is not so unblemished as to set him above the reach of detractors, is no doubt one which Spenser himself and his various friends and patrons in the Elizabethan ruling class would have found eminently familiar.

Of course, the moral absolutism of The Faerie Queene is not the naive morality of the fairy tale, wherein good and evil are beyond mixture and need never be called into question. But the moral complexity of Book One is still compatible, I think, with a morally absolutist view of the legitimacy of monarchical rule in general and of the Elizabethan regime in particular. That complexity, as I read it, resides in the fact that The Faerie Queene, as well as giving Queen Elizabeth and Spenser's various aristocratic patrons what might now be called 'good press', also argues the *legitimacy* of good press -- and, indeed, the positive *need* for good press -- in a world wherein even those who fight for what is good are fallen.[46] The gap, to which the poem draws attention, between the real world and its ideal poetic representation, is meant to signify, in other words, not a veiled subversive agenda, but (rather less dangerously) the importance in society of the role of the storyteller; it shows Spenser, not flirting with the consequences of

being seen to question in print the ultimate rightness of Elizabethan rule, but rather promoting, with a certain understandable partisanship toward his own interests, the importance of the panegyrical poet to the advancing of a good cause.[47]

Spenser's most succinct expression, in the first book of The Faerie Queene, of the relationship between storytelling and story-making is to be found in the repeated (and, incidentally, non-symbolic) figurative use of a sea voyage to represent the story which is told in the Legend of Holiness. When the narrator says, "Behold I see the hauen nigh at hand,/ To which I meane my wearie course to bend" (I.xii.1), it is clear that it is the *telling* of this story which is being represented as a sea voyage. But when he continues, "There this faire virgin [i.e. Una] wearie of her way/ Must landed be, now at her iourneyes end" (*ibid.*), it is equally clear that it is the narrated *action* -- specifically, Una's journey from her homeland to Faery Court and back again -- which is now being represented by the sea voyage. And yet the voyage that has 'wearied' both narrator and heroine is one and the same: they are aboard the same ship. There is, then, a deliberate conflation, here, of the two things which we can understand by a 'story': a story as a narration of events, and a story as the series of events narrated. Nor is it the narrator alone who uses this allegory in this way; rather, at least one of the

characters who takes part in the action, namely Una's father, sees the story in precisely the same terms, as a sea voyage which can be said to have "well arriued" at the "shore" at the moment when both the events and the telling of the events are complete (I.xii.17). Whether in the narrator's hands or in the hands of Una's father, the allegory of story as sea voyage creates the impression that the acting out and the reporting of a story together constitute one single movement. The fullest expression of this integration is in the legend's concluding canto:

> Now strike your sailes ye iolly Mariners,
> For we be come vnto a quiet rode,
> Where we must land some of our passengers,
> And light this wearie vessell of her lode.
> Here she a while may make her safe abode,
> Till she repaired haue her tackles spent,
> And wants supplide. And then againe abroad
> On the long voyage whereto she is bent:
> Well may she speede and fairely finish her intent.
>
> (I.xii.42)

Every major element in this stanza can be understood with reference both to the story as a thing lived and to the story as a thing told. The "safe abode" is both the house of Una's parents and the conclusion of the first book; Una debarks here both in the sense that she will remain at her parents' house and in the sense that she will not appear in subsequent books. The voyage will continue both in the sense that other adventures will be performed in the same imaginary world after the

completion of the knight's mission against the dragon, and in the sense that there are other books of The Faerie Queene still to be written; the Redcross knight will still be aboard when the ship leaves the haven, both in the sense that he will leave Una's parents' house for further adventures, and in the sense that he will figure in these subsequent books of the poem. There remains, however, one asymmetry, one way in which the stanza refers differently to those who live the story and to the one who tells it. Those who live the story are "passengers" on the ship (I.xii.42); but he who tells it is the one who can give the orders to the "iolly Mariners" first to "Vere the maine shete, and beare vp with the land"(I.xii.1), and then to "strike your sailes" (I.xii.42) -- in a word, he is the ship's captain. This, perhaps, is the most succinct and accurate way in which to describe the relationship between storytelling and story-making in Book One of The Faerie Queene: both are parts of one movement, but it is the storyteller who is in charge of guiding that movement to its proper end.

Notes to Chapter One: The Legend of Holiness

[1] These patterns of imagery and allusions are noted by Hamilton in The Faerie Queene, *loc. cit.* .

[2] In The Faerie Queene I.i.28.3n.

[3] As is suggested by Meyer 36.

[4] See for example Van Dyke 253, Meyer 36.

[5] Compare the assessments of the knight's behaviour in Dowden (Variorum, Vol. 1, p. 498) and Roberts 4.

[6] Mallette 9.

[7] As for example in the adventures of Sir Melias (Quest pp. 66-71) and in those of Sir Gawain (pp. 76-80). As Matarasso notes in the introduction (p. 65), "The stage is the same and so are the players, but all the accepted values are inverted".

[8] A similar point is made by Heale 36-7.

[9] Compare the interpretation of Roberts 4.

[10] Kermode 43.

[11] Thus, for example, the Protestant educationalist Roger Ascham's famous denunciation of the "books of chivalry", such as Malory's "Morte Darthur, the whole pleasure of which book standeth in two special points -- in open manslaughter and bold bawdry; in which book those be counted the noblest knights that do kill most men without any quarrel and commit foulest adulteries by subtlest shifts..." (68-9). Substantially the same suggestion is made by Tonkin 63.

[12] Una's character has traditionally been a special locus for critics' praise: see for example the Appendix

on "The Character of Una" in Variorum 496-500. As the ideal of the selflessly devoted woman has fallen out of fashion, such hymns have tended to give way to complaints that Una's character "is as one-dimensional as her name would suggest" (Meyer 42) -- an assessment which merely reverses earlier attitudes toward her simplicity, without re-examining the extent to which that supposed simplicity was itself a critical fabrication. Meyer suggests in passing that Una's appraisal of her knight's victory over Errour is problematic (p.36), but still, ultimately, sees "her allegorical significance as Truth" as limiting the amplitude of her character: "Truth is absolute, subject to danger to be sure, but not to development" (p.43). Mallette notices the badness of her advice on their meeting with Archimago, but does not consider the implications with respect to her reliability more generally.

[13] Alpers 29 argues that the celebration of the virtue is kept distinct from the irony of the situation; see also Dowden (Variorum Vol. 1, p. 499).

[14] As noted by Heale 36-7; see also Mallette 13.

[15] See Dees 559, Meyer 39-40.

[16] Dees 559.

[17] See for example Heale 37, Dees 559, Miller 121.

[18] Mallette 12.

[19] Mallette 12.

[20] Mallette 13.

[21] Mallette 10.

[22] Matthew 7:13, 7:26-7; allusions noted by Hamilton in The Faerie Queene *loc. cit.* . See also Meyer 38.

[23] Revelation 17:4 -- quoted by Hamilton in The Faerie Queene *loc. cit.* .

[24] See for example Meyer 38, who argues that "obvious" signs of the House of Pride's sinfulness are "there for us, the readers, not for [Redcross]"; compare Lewis (1967) 29-30. Meyer also seems to suggest that the knight's failure to read these signs is in some sense his own personal failing, resulting from his pride, but no attempt is made to reconcile these two apparently incompatible positions.

[25] See for example Kermode 39-41, Tonkin 61-2.

[26] Cheney 69-70.

[27] Roberts 59.

[28] In The Faerie Queene, *loc. cit.* .

[29] In The Faerie Queene, I.xii.31.8n.

[30] Dante, Purgatorio xxxi.94ff; see also xxviii.127-32, xxxiii.91ff.

[31] In The Faerie Queene, I.xii.31.8n.

[32] See Gohlke & Silberman *passim*; Berger (1991), who cites both these articles, asserts that "if the narrator and his story are working for the government, the poem is not. Rather it is a double agent that kidnaps the narrator and his chivalric idealism in the service of a more subversive agenda..." (p.48).

[33] Compare Sidney 24, 27.

[34] Amiot (trans. North), in his preface to Plutarch's Lives, p. 11.

[35] See for example Elyot's Book Named the Governor 228-231, where a fine balance is struck between acknowledging skepticism and upholding Homer as history.

[36] This and the following passages from Heywood, and their relevance to Renaissance conceptions of history, were brought to my attention by a talk entitled "'The Rape of Lucrece' and the Fall of Troy" given by Dr. Robert Maslen of Glasgow University, 21 May 1993.

[37] The combination of suspicion about the veracity of history from early times with the assertion that the real value of history is in its *exempla* of virtue and vice appears in Livy's Preface to his history of Rome (pp. 4-7), as well as in late medieval chronicles such as Higden's Polychronicon (see Levy 13-14), both influential in the Renaissance; it is restated frequently, for example by Thomas Elyot 231 and by Holinshed in his Preface to the Reader (Vol. 2, A3r). Sidney voices similar skepticism about the veracity of histories (p. 30) but, unusually, accords the power to teach morality to poetry alone (p. 32). The notion that the prospect of being praised or dispraised, oneself, by future historians inclines a person to virtue, is advanced by Amiot in his Preface to Plutarch's Lives (and translated into English by North -- p. 11), and by

Spenser himself in the View of the Present State of Ireland, p. 73; compare Hall's encomium of fame as that which distinguishes the noble from the base, and men from beasts (Dedication to Edward VI, p. v).

[38] View 73-5; quoting 75.

[39] View 74-5.

[40] View 73.

[41] Patterson 110-111.

[42] Patterson *passim*; see esp. 7-9.

[43] *Passim.* See for example 21ff.

[44] As noted by Hamilton, in The Faerie Queene, *loc. cit.* .

[45] O'Connell 11 argues (apropos of The Shepheardes Calender) for the compatibility of the "motives of appreciative acceptance and critical judgement" in Spenser's poetic relationship to state power. Compare Norbrook's reading of The Faerie Queene as "apocalyptic, prophetic, rather than merely panegyrical" (15) -- that is, as goal-directed in its deployment of praise, and therefore capable of criticism where it has often been seen as merely celebratory (4-6). See also Tonkin 88.

[46] Compare O'Connell 7: "the duty of the artist, in terms of the celebratory motive in Spenser's poetry, is to show to men within the fallen state the points of connection between their actual ruler and the ideal of which she is merely the human participation".

[47] Compare Shepherd 109, writing on The Teares of the Muses.

Chapter Two:

The Legend of Temperance -- A Question of Honour

When Guyon and the Palmer meet the Redcross knight in the opening canto of Book Two, the Palmer states the relationship between their respective quests as follows: "wretched we, where ye haue left your marke,/ Must now anew begin, like race to runne" (II.i.32). There is a certain ambiguity to this assertion. On one hand, his statement to the Redcross knight that their quest will begin "where ye haue left your marke" emphasizes the serial relationship of the two missions, and is conducive to Alastair Fowler's view that "Each book after the first is built upon the preceding book, and takes for granted the spiritual territory already conquered."[1] On the other hand, the Palmer's saying that they must "anew begin, like race to runne" emphasizes the parallel relationship of the missions, each beginning separately at Faery Court, and is more conducive to A. S. P. Woodhouse's interpretation of Guyon "as having to set out from the point at which the Redcross Knight started, not

from the point which he reached."[2] The actual relationship between the two quests, it appears to me, falls somewhere between these two readings: Fowler is essentially right, in that the bulk of the second book -- particularly from the third canto onward -- will indeed take for granted the "territory already conquered" in the first, and move on to further concerns; but Woodhouse is also right, in the sense that Guyon, in the opening cantos of his legend, will first have to repeat for himself, in miniature, the learning of the Redcross knight's lessons, before he can proceed beyond them. Accordingly, a brief comparison between the principal action of Book One and Guyon's first adventures in Book Two will serve as an introduction to the main themes explored in the second book.

Much of the first book was taken up with the Redcross knight's straying from his proper mission and his acceptance of Archimago and Duessa as his guides in the selection of alternative adventures. The movement toward his rehabilitation began when the story in which he was meant to be involved was brought back into view by Una's retelling of it, and was completed when he himself could articulate his own story and defend his version of events against the different interpretation put forward by his enemies. At the opening of the second book, Archimago and Duessa in a sense reprise the roles they played in the first; only this time it is Guyon, albeit much more

briefly and to a much less serious extent, who is their dupe, and who leaves behind his proper guide to pursue an adventure announced by Archimago and to champion Duessa's cause.[3] (That Guyon rashly leaves the Palmer behind when he rushes after Archimago with "zealous hast" (II.i.13) is not stated directly, but is made clear enough by the fact that the Palmer does not appear from this point until he is seen catching up to Guyon in stanza thirty-one.) After this one brief truancy, Guyon never again willingly leaves the Palmer's side; and when, on one occasion, he is parted from his guide against his will (II.vi.20), he shows an immediate and continuing recognition of the fact that the onus is now upon himself to steer the right course (II.vi.21, II.vii.1-2).[4] Correspondingly, after their one brief success in misleading Guyon, Archimago and Duessa fade quickly from the central role which they had in the first book to the peripheral part which they will play in the remainder of the poem. Clearly, then, in the opening action of the second book Guyon experiences in miniature, not only the Redcross knight's principal error of allowing his enemies to be the storytellers who guide the course of his story's development, but also the lesson which by the beginning of Book Two has made the Redcross knight invulnerable to his old enemies and to a repetition of the same kind of mistake (II.i.4). Further evidence of Guyon's much quicker progress to the kind of prudence and

self-sufficiency which characterize the Redcross knight toward the end of his story is that, by the end of the second canto of his legend, Guyon has done what the Redcross knight did not do until the twelfth: he has told his own story (II.ii.40ff). In other words, whereas the knight of holiness became a storyteller only in retrospect, Guyon learns to play this part while his mission is still before him -- in time for his recitation of his own story to play a part in keeping that story on track, in much the same way that Una used the repetition of her knight's mission to keep him moving toward his goal. Thus, Guyon's explanation of his mission at Medina's request, besides giving information to her and to the reader, seems to be a spur to himself; for within two stanzas of telling his story, we see him, "mindfull of his vow yplight", setting off to fulfil it (II.iii.1). Similarly, in his first conversation with Arthur, Guyon's demonstration of single-mindedness in the pursuit of his assigned quest (II.ix.8) is closely associated with his readiness to call to mind and to repeat once again "the story.../ Of false *Acrasia*, and her wicked wiles,/ Which to auenge, the Palmer him forth drew/ From Faery court" (II.ix.9).[5]

From the opening cantos of the Legend of Temperance, then, it becomes clear that the major problem posed in Book One -- that of rival storytellers actually being capable of diverting the knight patron into the

performance of deeds irrelevant or counterproductive to the story in which he should be engaged -- will not play a significant part in Book Two: for after his brief susceptibility to such a threat, Guyon shows himself as immune to it by the end of the second canto of his legend as the Redcross knight was by the very end of his own story. Hereafter, not only will Guyon himself be aware of the need to keep himself on track, but he will, through most of his journey, have the Palmer at his side to make clear to him the right path to follow by telling him the stories that he does not know and the natures of things whose appearance is ambiguous. On the other hand, however, the problem which faced the Redcross knight only at the very end of his legend -- the problem of the interpretation of those actions which he does undertake -- will dog Guyon throughout his adventures. He will be, through the whole of his legend, in a position comparable to that of the Redcross knight in the final canto of his story: his challenge not so much in keeping to the proper course of action, as in warding off negative interpretations of his deeds. In this respect, he has a distinctive challenge before him. His predecessor in the first book had a goal which, so long as he could keep to it, was itself virtually unambiguous: not even Duessa and Archimago tried to demonstrate that slaying the dragon was other than a good and glorious deed; and even Contemplation, while pointing out that it was sinful

relative to the standards of heaven, still saw in it sufficient worthiness as to insist on his carrying it out. Guyon's case is somewhat different; for as innumerable readers' reactions testify, it is not so immediately and indubitably clear that Guyon does a good and glorious thing in binding Acrasia and razing the Bower of Bliss.[6] What is more, along the way to this final goal, comparable difficulties will beset him in virtually all his actions: the danger not one of going astray, but of being interpreted unfavourably, either by the other characters with whom he interacts, or by the readers of the historical record (that is, The Faerie Queene) by means of which his deeds will be known to future generations (the poem's readers). More generally still, the question of interpretation of deeds -- the question of what is praiseworthy, and what shameful -- will be posed by almost every episode in the legend of temperance; and it will be seen to have consequences, not only for the characters within the story, but for the queen to whom the poem is dedicated as well. In the second book, then, there is a kind of reversal of emphasis with respect to the issues raised by the first: on one hand, the problem which dominated that book is run through quickly at the opening of this one; but on the other hand, the problem which was raised only at the very end of that book will dominate this one.

The evaluation of deeds as praiseworthy or shameful

is a continually recurring theme in the legend of temperance; and in virtually every instance in which such an evaluation occurs, there is confusion or conflict over what merits praise and what shame. In the opening action of the book, Guyon is confronted by this problem in its bluntest form: on one hand, he knows Redcross for a praiseworthy knight, and has heard reports that "he hath great glorie wonne" (II.i.19); on the other hand, he is now told that this same knight has committed a shameful and inexcusable crime, and is shown what seems to be proof of this fact. Here the confusion over praiseworthiness and shamefulness is the result of outright lies: Archimago and Duessa say that the knight has done something which he has not done in fact. (As usual with Archimago, there is an *element* of truth in his account, for Redcross has indeed participated in 'shaming' Duessa (I.viii.45-50); but the specific charge of rape is, of course, pure fabrication.) The confusion will be resolved when the liars are no longer believed, and when the shame which they imputed to the knight is felt instead by Guyon himself for believing them, and then finally wished upon themselves (II.i.30). In later episodes, the problem will generally be more subtle: not a question, simply, of whether allegations are outright lies, but of such matters as whether a given deed was in accord with the code of virtuous conduct; or if it was not, whether it was done intentionally; or if

intentionally, whether it was done from proper or improper motives. Such debates have to do with the question of the poem's figurative meaning insofar as its allegory is *exemplary* in nature. In other cases, the debate will have to do not with exemplification but with personification, and will turn on the question of whether characters and their actions are interpreted literally, according to their nature as human beings, or symbolically, according to abstract figurative meanings which they possess within the poem's imaginary world. In either case, the question will be twofold: first, what is the proper interpretation of a given character or action? and second, how can this proper interpretation be established against the claims of those who insist on interpreting that character or action otherwise?

The proem to the Legend of Temperance introduces that most basic problem besetting reports (which, as I have said, is to be explored narratively in the opening episode of the first canto), namely the problem that accounts which are said to be true can sometimes be mere inventions. But in the proem this theme is introduced in essentially the opposite form: for whereas, in the action that follows, Guyon's problem is *resolved* when he concludes that Archimago and Duessa have shamefully invented the story which defames the Redcross knight, in the proem the problem *begins* with the allegation that the narrator has shamefully invented the stories which he

reports as "antique history" and "matter of iust memory" (II.Pr.1). Apparently, doubts about the veracity of reports can, like reports themselves, work for both good and ill. Interestingly, the narrator does not directly answer the imagined charges of his detractors that he has made up his "history", but rather, in effect, pursues his opponents' skepticism to a *reductio ad absurdum* by opening up comparable room for doubt on the other side of the argument. Against those who would note that something's being reported does not prove that it is true (II.Pr.1.6-9), he points out in return that, equally, something's *not* being reported does not prove that it is *not* true (II.Pr.2-3). (These points would gain a certain resonance, we might suppose, by being made apropos of the New World, whose nature and even whose existence the vast majority of Spenser's readers -- including the queen herself -- would know only by report.) With doubt thus sown effectively on both sides, and the possibilities either of proving or of disproving the truth of his stories equally out of reach, he shifts onto more pragmatic ground, saying, in effect, that regardless of whether the history is true, Queen Elizabeth ought to accept it because it serves as a vehicle for displaying her "glory" to her subjects (II.Pr.4-5). He argues, in other words, that in the absence of any possibility of proof, it is better to accept a story that is favourable to one's own interests.

The same principle can be seen at work in the subsequent episode wherein Guyon must decide what report of the Redcross knight to believe. The tenuous relationship between claims to truth and truth itself is emphasized from Guyon's opening exchange with Archimago, who paradoxically uses an appeal to this tenuousness to bolster his false claim to be telling the truth, by appearing to be tormented by his inability to prove the truth of his report:

> Deare Lady how shall I declare thy cace,
> Whom late I left in langourous constraint?
> Would God thy selfe now present were in place,
> To tell this ruefull tale; thy sight could win thee grace.
>
> (II.i.9)

Again, a few lines later, Archimago seems to wish that his declaration of what has happened could carry the same conviction as the "sight" itself:

> None but that saw (quoth he) would weene for troth,
> How shamefully that Maid he did torment.
>
> (II.i.11)

Part of Archimago's and Duessa's trick, in the following stanzas, is to make it seem to Guyon as though he is getting closer to the act itself from which the report springs. For Archimago, having called attention to the tenuousness of his own claim to be telling the truth, does not himself venture to say that the Redcross knight is the perpetrator of the crime: rather, by bringing

Guyon to Duessa, and letting her make the accusation herself, he appears to fulfil his own wish that the wronged maiden herself "now present were in place,/ To tell this ruefull tale". Now, it seems, Guyon has not only the report, but the "sight" to back it up. But of course, what he really has is only another report, albeit from the supposed injured party herself (II.i.18), and consequently he has no more certain a hold on truth than he had before.

In spite of his amazement that the Redcross knight could ever do such a shameful thing -- an amazement itself based partly on the report he has heard of the knight (II.i.19) -- Guyon agrees to champion the lady's cause. But in the event he does not fulfil his promise to her that Redcross

> ...shortly shall againe be tryde,
> And fairely quite him of th'imputed blame,
> Else be ye sure he dearely shall abyde,
> Or make you good amendment for the same...
>
> (II.i.20).

For when the two knights meet, Guyon puts Redcross to trial neither verbally nor by force of arms. On the contrary, he turns away from the trial of strength at the last moment (II.i.26), suddenly concluding, without any apparent new evidence, that all the stories he has been told to this point have been fabrications, and that Archimago himself is "A false infamous faitour"

(II.i.30). It appears that this strange outcome is the result of conflicting ideas of what is shameful: for Guyon goes to avenge Duessa's apparent "shame" (II.i.20), only to turn aside because of the "shame" which, he fears, will blot his own honour if he attacks the Redcross knight (II.i.27). Hamilton's explanation of why Guyon concludes that attacking Redcross would be shameful, namely that "S[penser]'s chivalric code does not encourage unprovoked aggression"[7] will not do: for in remarkably similar circumstances at the opening of Book Three, Britomart carries through an attack on Guyon without any provocation whatsoever, and no hint comes from any quarter that the deed shames her (III.i.4ff). Rather, what nearly shamed Guyon, as he himself explains, was that

> ...cursed steele against that badge I bent,
> The sacred badge of my Redeemers death,
> Which on your shield is set for ornament...
>
> (II.i.27).

Now, this is not a recognition scene for Guyon; he already knows that it is the Redcross knight against whom he means to champion Duessa's cause (II.i.19).[8] Nor is the scene, broadly speaking, about religious error; for we must take into account the other knight's response, in which he recognizes that it was an "error" on his own part that his

> ...hastie hand so farre from reason strayd,
> That almost it did haynous violence
> On that faire image of that heauenly Mayd,
> That decks and armes your shield with faire defence...
>
> (II.i.28).

The point of the exchange is that the knights form the basis for a reconciliation between themselves by acknowledging the importance of one another's principal virtues -- Guyon apologizing for nearly having performed an unholy action, and Redcross, an intemperate one -- just as, in the opening encounter of the third book, Guyon and Britomart will be reconciled "Through goodly temperance, and affection chaste" (III.i.12). For the knights themselves, the situation is conceived in terms of their mutual allegiances to what is symbolized on their respective shields, as may be seen from the fact that the common factor in their apologies is each one's recognition that he has been wrong to turn against a symbol of something to which he himself owes allegiance. It appears, then, that what Guyon recognizes as shameful is that he would have turned against an ally on the basis of a stranger's report. The lesson seems to be that, given the uncertainty of report, one ought not to turn, on the basis of hearsay, against one's own. On the contrary, the appropriate way to behave is that demonstrated by the Palmer, who reappears on the scene at this point: one ought to reinforce, not undermine, the good report of one's allies, by repeating again the

praiseworthiness of their deeds (II.i.32). As in the proem, the conclusion appears to be that in the absence of any possibility of proof, it is better to accept a story that is favourable to one's own interests.

The action which develops in the remainder of the first canto shows certain remarkable similarities to this opening episode. Once again, Guyon comes upon a woman who appears to have been grievously wronged (II.i.35ff); once again, he coaxes her into telling him who is responsible for her injury (compare II.i.14-18, II.i.46-48); and once again, on the basis of her report, he swears to revenge her wrong (compare II.i.20, II.i.60-1). The principal differences between the two situations appear to be in the extent of the injury which the woman has suffered, and in the degree to which Guyon binds himself to vengeance, both of them much greater in this second episode. Of course, there is also the essential difference that whereas Duessa's allegation against the Redcross knight is false, Amavia's allegation against Acrasia is true; but the question must be, by what sign does Guyon know that Amavia's allegation is true? That is, how can he be certain, as he swears an oath to avenge her death, that he is not in the wrong a second time? In fact, it is only in the second canto that a fully satisfactory answer to this question is provided: the reason why Guyon can bind himself to vengeance against Acrasia on behalf of Amavia without

fear of incurring the same shame which he nearly brought upon himself by attacking the Redcross knight is that he already knows that Acrasia is an enemy of Gloriana's court, whose destruction at his hands is already sanctioned by Gloriana herself (II.ii.43ff). The withholding of this information for a full canto seems, on the face of it, very strange: one would have imagined that Amavia's revelation that it was Acrasia who was responsible for her woes would have occasioned some reminiscence, on the part of Guyon or the Palmer, of the fact that they were already on a mission against this Acrasia -- indeed, that this mission was the very reason for their journeying together. (Perhaps the difficult fit of these episodes is what prompted Spenser to tell the story somewhat differently when he came to write the Letter to Raleigh.[9]) But the suspension of this information, however improbable it seems, does achieve another purpose: by first showing us the personal motive of Guyon's quest and its basis in a report which he himself hears and decides to act upon, and only some time later revealing his impersonal motive under the orders of his queen, it reveals just how much more secure is the latter than the former. Up until the time when Guyon explains his mission to Medina at the end of the second canto, his position seems perilous, in that the circumstances of his action do not appear to be clearly distinct from those of the book's opening episode in

which he was the dupe of Archimago and Duessa. If we add to this Medina's condemnation of "mortall vengeaunce" as a response "to crime abhord" (II.ii.30), Guyon's impassioned oath to avenge himself on Acrasia for the wrongs reported by Amavia begins to look ill-considered indeed. But when he explains his mission as a quest authorized by Gloriana, we see him at once moving from what appeared to be a dangerous reliance upon random report and personal vengeance, to a more secure basis in the institution of the court and its system of mediating report and vengeance so as to remove the responsibility for both from the individual knight. Such a system does not, in itself, guarantee the detection of false reports or the appropriateness of every act of vengeance (although the "heauenly" authority of the queen who presides over that court may do so (I.x.59 -- see Chapter One, pp. 182-3)); but it does at least ensure the smooth working together of the knights of the court, and prevents them from being turned one against another through the efforts of malicious slanderers. To this extent, it solves the first and most radical problem posed by reports, namely the threat that dissension will be brought about by the deliberate purveyors of falsehood. Hereafter, the practitioners of the all-out lie accomplish very little: Duessa disappears from the action, and Archimago slips unwittingly into a parodic subplot wherein he trades lies with Trompart and

Braggadocchio with the end result that everyone is deceived and nothing accomplished (II.iii.11*ff*). Meanwhile Guyon himself, having grounded his action in the authority of the court, addresses himself "Vnto the iourney which he had behight" with a new clarity of purpose (II.iii.1), and we, along with him, move on to an exploration of some of the more subtle problems of interpretation.

In the following cantos, and particularly in his encounters with the brothers Pyrochles and Cymochles, Guyon is repeatedly embroiled in a debate, not over what to do or over what has happened, but over whether his deeds, such as they are, are praiseworthy or shameful. At the same time, corresponding to praise and shame, a second dichotomy is introduced, between nobility and baseness of character -- the relationship being, of course, that praiseworthy and shameful actions pertain, respectively, to noble and base characters. Because of the ambiguity of the Renaissance notion of nobility, the relationship works both ways: characters noble by birth are inclined naturally to praiseworthy action, and those born basely to shameful deeds (see for example the discussion of horsemanship in II.iv.1); but at the same time, regardless of whether one is high- or low-born, praiseworthy action ennobles one's character and shameful action abases it.[10]

The first story in which these interrelations are

explored is relatively straightforward. Braggadocchio is both base-born (a "Peasant" (II.iii.43) and a "bastard" to boot (II.iii.42)), and a performer of shameful deeds. The only complication to his case is that he has pretensions to the opposite, that is, to nobility and praiseworthiness. All his values are inverted: so that, for example, where a truly noble knight would make a virtue of defending the helpless, he tries to establish his nobility by bullying and terrifying them (e.g. II.iii.6-8); and whereas everyone else speaks of rape as a shameful act, he seems to feel that it is his failure to rape Belphoebe which is shameful (II.iii.43). The narrator succinctly summarizes the inversion of his values:

> To thinke without desert of gentle deed,
> And noble worth to be aduaunced hye:
> Such prayse is shame...
> (II.iii.10).

Braggadoccio's ignoble desire for undeserved honour involves him, from the beginning, in thoughts of the court (II.iii.5); and soon we find him in the odd position of defending the life of the court -- in which he has never taken part -- against Belphoebe, who is its detractor (II.iii.39-42). Belphoebe's response to his fatuous argument in favour of court life repeats, in essence, the point already made by the narrator, that praise without praiseworthiness amounts to nothing: that

"without desert", being in the public eye (II.iii.39) is no better than "darke obscuritee" (II.iii.40). But her insistence on the importance of being removed from court in order to perform deeds of merit adds something new. Previously, we have seen that good deeds, unless they are publicized and made famous at court, are at the mercy of detractors (Chapter One, pp. 196-8); now we see the opposite side of the equation, namely that the life of the court, without a basis in the action that merits fame and publicity, degenerates into a vain mutual admiration society. Good deeds and good report, then, are inseparable, for each needs the other.

The second episode in which questions of nobility and baseness play a part is that reported by Phedon. As he explains, it was his fortune "To loue a Ladie faire of great degree,/ The which was borne of noble parentage" (II.iv.19) and to win her love in return; but he was tricked by his false friend Philemon into believing that she had given herself to "a groome of base degree" (II.iv.24). Phedon's deception, as he watches Philemon courting his lady's maid and believes it to be the groom courting his lady herself (II.iv.28), is among other things a confusion of nobility and baseness: he thinks that what he sees is a man of low degree courting a noble woman, when in fact it is a noble man courting a woman of low degree. More fundamentally, he fails to see that it is his supposed friend, rather than his lady, whose

nobility and "honorable blood" is "distaind" by base deeds (II.iv.22). This episode also shows, once again, the consequences of betraying trusts (as Philemon betrays Phedon and Phedon his beloved), and turning against one's own on the basis of report; once more, we see that even the evidence of one's own eyes should be treated as insufficiently certain grounds for such a betrayal.

It is when we come to Pyrochles and Cymochles that the questions of nobility and baseness, and of the associated praise and shame, begin to touch Guyon himself. Pyrochles' herald Atin introduces this pair of characters into the poem with an account that blazons both their noble blood and their noble deeds, and which implies that the latter spring from the former:

> *Pyrochles* is his name, renowmed farre
> For his bold feats and hardy confidence,
> Full oft approu'd in many a cruell warre,
> The brother of *Cymochles*, both which arre
> The sonnes of old *Acrates* and *Despight*,
> *Acrates* sonne of *Phlegeton* and *Iarre*;
> But *Phlegeton* is sonne of *Herebus* and *Night*;
> But *Herebus* sonne of *Aeternitie* is hight.
>
> So from immortall race he does proceede,
> That mortall hands may not withstand his might...
>
> (II.iv.41-2).

This genealogy, of course, while impressive enough in a certain sense, in another respect damns the brothers before they can even appear. It is all a matter of where one lays the emphasis: whether, with Atin, on "*Aeternitie*" (a fairly lofty-sounding forebear), or upon

some of the others, whose ignoble and even infernal names Atin lets pass without specific commentary.[11]

The deeds of these brothers will prove as questionable as their pedigree. On one hand, Atin is no mere Trompart, and Pyrochles no mere Braggadocchio: this herald's claims as to his knight's martial prowess, even if somewhat exaggerated, are far from wholly unfounded. But on the other hand, even if Pyrochles and Cymochles have actually performed mighty deeds, there remains the question of whether these deeds, such as they are, are as praiseworthy as they are made out to be. Thus, for example, the Palmer responds disparagingly to Atin's boast that his knight has sent him out "To seeke *Occasion*" for a fight, maintaining that such an action is foolish rather than brave and deserves rebuke rather than praise (II.iv.43-4). Cymochles also compromises his martial prowess, but in different ways: he is "Famous throughout the world for warlike prayse,/ And glorious spoiles, purchast in perilous fight", but seeks to augment his fame by the apparently shameful act of giving the carcasses of his victims to wild animals; what is more, he dedicates his victories in war to Acrasia, a lady whose whole business is to shame warriors like himself and bring their praises to nought (II.v.26).

What makes the episodes involving Pyrochles and Cymochles complex in the challenge they pose for Guyon is that, at the same time that the brothers have reference

to questionable standards in accounting themselves noble and praiseworthy, they and their associate Atin busily call into question Guyon's own praiseworthiness by casting doubt on the standards according to which his own actions are performed. Thus Pyrochles turns against Guyon his accidental killing of Pyrochles' horse as if he has done it on purpose:

> Disleall knight, whose coward courage chose
> To wreake it selfe on beast all innocent,
> And shund the marke, at which it should be ment,
> Thereby thine armes seeme strong, but manhood fraile...
>
> (II.v.5).

Indeed, Pyrochles makes as much as he possibly can of this happenstance, going so far as to claim that such an action reveals the general course of Guyon's behaviour by suggesting to him, "So hast thou oft with guile thine honour blent" (II.v.5). Guyon, wounded by the stroke that follows these charges, seems as "much ashamd" at having been susceptible to the verbal as to the physical blow (II.v.7). Only when Pyrochles himself has been forced to acknowledge the power of "fortunes doome vniust" (II.v.12) -- the only real culprit in the chance death of his horse -- can Guyon feel satisfied that he is acquitted of this shameful charge. Nevertheless, he will be subjected to other, similar misrepresentations. In the following canto, Atin interprets Guyon's temperate decision to break off his fight with Cymochles and to

depart from Phaedria's island as his having "foully fled from famous enemie" (II.vi.39). Then, two cantos later, when Guyon lies unconscious, exhausted by his ordeal in the cave of Mammon, Pyrochles and Cymochles interpret what appears to be his death as a sign that he lived shamefully (II.viii.12ff). As Cymochles states the case:

> ...gold all is not, that doth golden seeme,
> Ne all good knights, that shake well speare and shield:
> The worth of all men by their end esteeme,
> And then due praise, or due reproch them yield;
> Bad therefore I him deeme, that thus lies dead on field.
>
> (II.viii.14)

Spenser's putting this distinction between mere martial prowess and true praiseworthiness into the mouth of Cymochles exemplifies how, in these central cantos of Book Two, evil characters make it exceedingly difficult for their virtuous adversaries like Guyon and the Palmer to establish their claim to being in the right, by laying claim, themselves, to the very standards of judgement which would justly condemn them. Thus, for example, the battle that develops over Guyon's body is as much a contest over who has the right to judge the other party's behaviour as of force of arms, with Arthur and the pagan brothers trading accusations of criminal behaviour (II.viii.28-31).

One final episode in which the significance of Guyon's actions is contested by these persistent troublemakers is that wherein both Atin and Pyrochles

accuse Guyon of having behaved shamefully in binding Occasion in chains (II.iv.45, II.v.17). This instance is especially significant, for two reasons: first, because this episode involves the characters themselves in the interpretation of the symbolic nature of things in their world; second, because the charge which they make, namely that Guyon has acted dishonourably in attacking and binding a helpless woman, would seem to have consequences not only for the episode at hand, but also for Guyon's ultimate intention of serving similar treatment to the enchantress Acrasia.[12]

When Guyon first encounters Occasion and Furor assaulting Phedon, he responds to the situation in entirely literal terms, without any idea that these characters might have symbolic significance (II.iv.3ff). Nevertheless, the symbolic significance which they do have is very real in his world: it renders wholly useless, even counterproductive, the means of dealing with the situation which would have been effective had Guyon's literal interpretation been an adequate one (II.iv.8-9); and only when the Palmer stays Guyon from his ineffective course of action and explains to him that his opponents have figurative meanings which govern the outcome of any attempt to deal with them (II.iv.10-11) does Guyon come to grips with the situation. In this episode, Guyon is very like any of the knights in The Quest of the Holy Grail who fail to recognize that the

people and things that they encounter have symbolic dimensions which entirely dictate the effectiveness of all responses to them; the Palmer, in turn, plays a part like that of any of the helpful monks in the Grail story who explain to such knights the symbolic meanings of which they would otherwise be ignorant.[13] Guyon immediately gets into the allegorical spirit of things, finding as if magically all manner of props suitable to the figurative meanings which the Palmer has attributed to the old woman and her son: "chaines", "fetters", and "an yron racke" with which to bind Furor (II.iv.14-5), a "stake" to which to tie Occasion (II.iv.13) and even "an yron lock" which he contrives to "fasten" to "her vngratious tong" (II.iv.12) -- something which would have seemed horrible indeed if much attention were being paid to her literal meaning. But this, of course, is precisely what Atin and Pyrochles will both do, the one reviling him for choosing "With silly weake old woman thus to fight" (II.iv.45), the other accusing him of having

> ...done great tort
> Vnto an aged woman, poore and bare,
> And thralled her in chaines with strong effort,
> Voide of all succour and needfull comfort...
>
> (II.v.17).

Of the two, Pyrochles seems genuinely ignorant of Occasion's figurative meaning, as Guyon was when he first

encountered her (although Pyrochles does at least know her name (II.v.17)); for he brings upon himself the same kind of trouble which Guyon, out of his own ignorance, very nearly ran into before the Palmer explained to him her symbolic nature (II.v.20ff). Atin, on the other hand, seems to know her figurative meaning, for he immediately recognizes her as that "Occasion" for a fight which he has been seeking on behalf of his master (II.iv.43): the ironic point is that it is precisely by pretending *not* to understand her nature, and accordingly speaking of her as if she is nothing more than a "silly weake old woman", that he is able to make her, quite literally, the occasion that he is seeking for issuing a challenge to Guyon.

The traditional suspicion among critics that, at this point in the poem, Spenser's use of allegory is degenerating into something dull and workmanlike in contrast to the sophistication of the first book, has at last begun to give way to attempts to engage with the real cleverness of what Spenser is doing in such an episode as Guyon's encounter with Furor and Occasion.[14] As we have begun to see, far from simply making a dull point about the temperate man having to stop the occasion for furor before he can control his furor itself (Guyon does learn this lesson here, but that is far from all that happens) Spenser is actually putting to work the very symbolic structure of meaning in the imaginary world

created by his poem. There is, however, another passage in Book Two which is still regularly cited -- equally wrongly, I think -- as an example of Spenser's allegory at its least sophisticated: namely the episode wherein Arthur and Guyon visit the House of Alma. Critics have long condemned this episode on the charges that the whole conceit is hackneyed, and that its figurative meaning is dull and its literal meaning silly; among more recent detractors, most have been content with disparaging the relation between literal and figurative meaning in the episode as "mechanical".[15] What all such assessments fail to notice, however, is the cleverness and wit with which Spenser constructs the relationship between these two meanings, and the significant way in which this relationship develops the themes of the book as a whole.

Now, admittedly, one could be forgiven for thinking that the allegory has sunk about as low as it can go by the time we follow the waste from the castle's kitchen to "*Port Esquiline*, whereby/ It was auoided quite, and throwne out priuily" (II.ix.32); but it is at just this point when, brought back to the point of view of Guyon and Arthur, we start to see in the scene something more sophisticated than privy humour. The knights have just completed their tour of what (deliberately conflating the literal and figurative) we might call the castle's digestive tract:

> Which goodly order, and great workmans skill
> Whenas those knights beheld, with rare delight,
> And gazing wonder they their minds did fill;
> For neuer had they seene so straunge a sight.
>
> (II.ix.33).

There is a trickiness to the humour of this passage which can take one unawares. Is the joke on Arthur and Guyon, as we might at first suppose, because what so awes them is 'really' nothing more than an ordinary human body, rather ingloriously involved in digesting food and eliminating waste? Or is it on us, for smugly assuming that, because we have spotted the figurative meaning of the passage, we have thereby understood the whole working of the allegory? A moment's consideration ought to convince us that, in fact, the sight of such a bizarre house, a hybrid of castle and human body, would probably occasion the very sort of response that it receives from Guyon and Arthur. By placing that response before us, Spenser reminds us that, however "straunge a sight" we may be confronted with as a result, we are not to assume that we can separate the scene's literal and figurative meanings; for the strange fact, in the imaginary world inhabited by Arthur and Guyon, is that the objects of their experience have both meanings at once.

At the next stage in the knights' tour, the poem once again, and even more pointedly, draws attention to the symbolic nature of its imaginary world, and forces both the knights themselves and us as readers to grapple with

its strangeness. Among those whom the visitors meet in "the Parlour" (II.ix.33) is a maiden so reticent

> That *Guyon* meruayld at her uncouth cace:
> Till *Alma* him bespake, Why wonder yee
> Faire Sir at that, which ye so much embrace?
> She is the fountaine of your modestee;
> You shamefast are, but *Shamefastnesse* it selfe is shee.
>
> (II.ix.43)

Just as was the case with Occasion and Furor, there are two possible ways for an inhabitant of The Faerie Queene's imaginary world to interpret this character: on one hand, she is a woman to whom Guyon can make social overtures; on the other hand, she is shamefacedness itself, the abstract quality which inclines Guyon to temperance. Similarly, Arthur meets Prays-desire, who is both a lady and the abstract quality which inspires him (II.x.36-9). But whereas, in the episode surrounding Guyon's binding of Occasion, the two different interpretations lead to two different responses and are made the issue of an argument, here the two interpretations are held simultaneously. Hence the knights can continue to treat Shamefastnesse and Prays-desire just as they would any ordinary court ladies of particularly congenial dispositions, even after they know their symbolic significance: "Thus they awhile with court and goodly game,/ Themselues did solace each one with his Dame" (II.ix.44).

In both these episodes in the House of Temperance, as

well as in Guyon's dealings with Occasion and Furor, the principal way in which the experiences of characters within The Faerie Queene's imaginary world defy the logic of our own experience (except, perhaps, of our dreams) is that there is no clear distinction to be made between what is *inside* and what is *outside*. Shamefastnesse is both a person who exists outside Guyon, to whom he can speak, and a quality which exists inside his own heart.[16] More generally, when Guyon and Arthur tour the House of Temperance, what they see around them is, at the same time, that which is physically inside them. And again, the same strange identity of inside and outside is at work in Guyon's initial fight with Furor, which -- without ever ceasing to be a fight against an external opponent -- seems to be, at the same time, a fight against himself (II.iv.8).

This lack of a clear distinction between inside and outside appears not only with respect to the symbolic nature of the things encountered by the poem's characters, but in other ways as well in the description of the House of Alma. The castle is beset by external invaders who seek to destroy it, and against which it keeps itself firmly locked (II.ix.10-12); the deformity of these invaders is emphasized (II.ix.13, II.xi.8, *etc.*) in contrast to the exquisite proportions and good order of the building to which they lay siege (II.ix.22, *etc.*). But it turns out that, in spite of all attempts to keep

what is ugly and deformed outside, the castle itself already has, within it, an intrinsic imperfection of its own: it consists of two parts, one "immortall, perfect, masculine", but the other "imperfect, mortall, foeminine" (II.ix.22). Indeed, the structure of the castle so incorporates imperfection that, quite apart from the siege laid by its enemies, its destruction is made inevitable by the very corruptible, earthy material from which it is built (II.ix.21). Even the emphasis, in the description of the castle/body, upon the processes of digestion occasions a repetition of the same principle: for although care is taken not to allow anything noxious, hostile, or disorderly to enter (II.ix.23-26), nevertheless "noyous" substances appear inside which have to be "auoided" (II.ix.31-2). The fact that, regardless of what care is taken to keep imperfection outside, it turns out to exist inside as well, makes the whole castle intrinsically susceptible to the attackers: "Their force is fiercer through infirmitie/ Of the fraile flesh, relenting to their rage" (II.xi.1); each external attacker corresponds to something intrinsic to the house, and attacks "his proper part,/ And his contrary obiect" (II.xi.6).

The internal division of the castle into two parts, one "imperfect" but the other "perfect", suggests, as it were, a second line of defense, that is, a second division defining the point beyond which imperfection

does not invade the castle's structure.[17] But what the knights see when they ascend to the supposedly "perfect" part of the castle reveals that once again, what is meant to be outside turns out to be inside as well: for nothing within the castle so closely resembles the deformed rout that besieges it as the disordered shapes which are seen in Phantastes' chamber (II.ix.50-1)[18]; and even in the chamber of the more sober Eumnestes, the supposedly "incorrupted" scrolls kept in his "immortall scrine" turn out to "all worme-eaten, and full of canker holes" (II.ix.56-7).

The attempts of the castle's defenders to keep outside what, in fact, is already and intrinsically inside, have parallels in the knights' reactions to those things outside themselves which symbolize things inside them. Thus Arthur admonishes Prays-desire for what seems to him too solemn a demeanor, oblivious to the fact that he himself "may vnwares be blotted with the same", only to have it pointed out to him that the demeanor he admonishes is his very own (II.ix.37-9); Guyon, too, thinks his own temperament "vncouth" when he sees it externalized, failing to recognize that all the time it remains within him as well (II.ix.43).

In all these instances in which the knights reckon with the symbolic nature of their world, attention is drawn to the persistence of the literal meaning in spite of figurative significance. Sometimes, so long as the

symbolic nature of a thing is understood, this continued existence of the literal meaning causes no problems, as when Arthur and Guyon continue to chat with the ladies of the parlour after they know them also to be abstract qualities within their own hearts. But more often, it is a source of wonder -- as when the knights are shown the castle's kitchen -- if not of trouble, as when Guyon is repeatedly reminded of the fact that, in binding Occasion, he has also bound an old woman. This persistent doubleness of meaning, which is characteristic of symbols, seems also to be explored in the poem in another way, namely in Spenser's strange and bold use of allusion in the Legend of Temperance.

Again and again in the second book of The Faerie Queene, Spenser alludes to passages in other works whose original meanings jar markedly with the meanings to which he bends them -- in contrast, for example, to the pattern of Biblical allusions in Book One which form a reliable basis for evaluating the Redcross knight's adventures (see Chapter One, pp. 170-77). Thus, in his encounter with Belphoebe (II.iii.32-33), Trompart is like Virgil's Aeneas encountering Venus (Aeneid I.314-328), the heroic original being turned to burlesque.[19] Even more daringly, on Phaedria's island the sacred is transformed into the immoral, the island itself being very like the garden of Eden (II.vi.12), and Phaedria's defense of idleness (II.vi.16) strikingly like verses from the

Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:28ff) -- a use of allusion which some readers of earlier generations found unworthy of a Christian poet.[20] All these allusions are so manifest that an educated reader of Spenser's day could not easily have missed them, nor have failed to feel the clash between the originals and the uses to which they are put. It seems that such passages have something in common with the strange symbols that populate Spenser's imaginary world, in that they, too, in their own fashion, bring to our attention the way in which things that have one meaning, but are subsequently given another, retain with great persistence their original associations. The critic who objects to Spenser's putting a reminiscence of Christ's words into Phaedria's argument for indolence is, in this respect, very like Atin and Pyrochles, objecting to Guyon's having bound what they insist on interpreting as an old woman.

All these matters which we have been considering -- those of distinguishing the inside from the outside, the figurative from the literal, and the allusion from the original -- have this in common, that they are explorations of the problems which beset attempts to separate things from their original meanings and associations. This theme appears once again in the narrator's address to the queen in the tenth canto of Book Two, this time cast in terms of the difficulty of separating that which is lofty from earthly origins.[21]

The problem, as first introduced, appears to be chiefly the narrator's own, as he asks,

> ...who shall lend me wings, with which from ground
> My lowly verse may loftily arise,
> And lift it selfe vnto the highest skies?
>
> (II.x.1).

But such a movement from earth to the sky, it soon turns out, is not only required of the narrator, but needs also to be attributed to the object of his intended description, the queen herself, in order to establish her own loftiness:

> Liues ought, that to her linage may compaire,
> Which though from earth it be deriued right,
> Yet doth it selfe stretch forth to heauens hight...[?]
>
> (II.x.2).

The theme of the difficulty of separating things from their original associations, then, has brought us back to the problem of distinguishing nobility from baseness. It is not suggested that Elizabeth will have any difficulty comparable to the narrator's in exalting herself above her earthly origins; indeed, her loftiness is presented as an established fact.[22] Nevertheless, the two upward movements -- that of verse, and that of lineage -- cannot really be separated from one another so easily as this; for a lineage is a kind of story, and like any story consists of two essential parts which cannot be separated from one another: a series of deeds which is recounted

in words, and the series of words which recounts these deeds. As the narrator himself says, it is precisely in order to "recount" the queen's lineage, or what he otherwise calls "the famous auncestries/ Of my most dreaded Soueraigne" (II.x.1), that he needs a lofty means of expression. The problem of exalting the queen's lineage, of setting her above her earthly origins, is the problem of the one who tells her story.[23] As the early cantos of Book Two established, good deeds and good report are indispensable to one another.

The earthliness of the queen's lineage, like the lineage itself, is a twofold thing: on one hand, there is the earthliness of the deeds which are the basis of report; on the other hand, there is the earthliness of report itself. It is for help in transcending the earthliness of report that the narrator petitions the Muses (II.x.1-3). The ideal report would be such as is kept by the gods themselves to celebrate their own deeds; it is with "some relish of that heauenly lay" that the narrator hopes to be graced (II.x.3). It is claimed several times in The Faerie Queene that such a heavenly record does exist of the stories which the poem relates. Thus, for example, it is said on one occasion that "aboue the Northerne starre/ Immortall fame for euer hath enrold" the "noble deedes" of Queen Elizabeth's "fathers and great Grandfathers of old" (II.x.4), and on another, that the divine Muses have an "euerlasting scryne" in

which they keep records of all the deeds recounted in the poem (I.Pr.2). At the same time, however, it is emphasized that it is human beings, not the gods, who are responsible for building up and preserving that record of their own deeds which gives them a kind of immortality: for "Immortall fame... hath enrold" the "noble deedes" of ages past only "As in that old mans booke they were in order told" (II.x.4), that is, only as they have survived in human memory, with its reliance upon "old records from auncient times deriu'd" (II.ix.57); and that which is recorded "aboue the Northerne starre" (II.x.4) is only that which human beings themselves have managed to "lift... vnto the highest skies" (II.x.1). Consequently, the very fame which is said to be "Immortall" (II.x.4) and "euerlasting" (I.xi.5, II.i.32) turns out to be dependent upon the temporal conditions of its historical transmission, and therefore subject to every kind of corruption that besets the world of mortality, be it partiality or error or outright forgetting. Hence the contradictory descriptions of Eumnestes' records on one hand as "incorrupted" and "laid... vp in [an] immortall scrine", but on the other as "all worme-eaten, and full of canker holes" (II.ix.56-7): the one states the ideal to which history aspires, of eternally preserving the memory of "noble deedes"; the other reminds us of the sobering fact that mortality infects all things human, even the very devices by means of which we seek to overcome our

mortality. Hence, too, the fact that, however the narrator may aspire to "some relish of that heauenly lay" sung by the gods (II.x.3), he will in practice only repeat what is written in the "antique Registers" (II.ix.59) of history, in spite of the great uncertainty (II.x.5) and even the "monstrous error" (II.x.8) that has crept into these chronicles over time.

The earthly conditions upon which all knowledge of the queen's lineage depends brings us to the other half of the problem which faces the one who seeks to glorify her through a presentation of her "great auncestry" (II.Pr.4). Built up from a great number of sources representing a whole spectrum of political and religious allegiances, and compounded almost indistinguishably of fact, opinion, and invention, the chronicles available in Spenser's day present a messy and deeply ambivalent account of history, and one which, in spite of superficial rationalizations on the part of their compilers, generally does not lift the reader, through the kind of hindsight which we expect historians to exercise, either above the limited perspectives of those who lived through the events or above the conflicting biases of those who have reported them; such an account, beginning from the way in which "events... would have appeared in the year when they happened", and then obscuring more than clarifying this limited perspective through the process of transmission, rather accentuates

than diminishes a sense of the chaos and brutality of Britain's royal past.[24] It was by no means a straightforward matter to find, in a record of this kind, a legacy of "noble deedes" which clearly contributed to the greater glory of their inheritor.

One point in particular required careful handling, namely the derivation of the queen's right to rule. As Spenser expresses it, the basis of any right to rule is conquest, or lineal descent from a conqueror: "For all is the conqueror's, as Tully to Brutus saith".[25] Hence Elizabeth's right to rule is "descended.../ From mightie kings and conquerours in warre" (II.x.4). But a great deal of flexibility was needed in interpreting this principle. On one hand, the Tudors' claim to the throne by lineal descent from William the Conqueror was anything but straightforward; indeed, this was one of the reasons why the additional claim was so often made, as it is in The Faerie Queene, for their derivation from "this renowmed Prince", Arthur (II.x.4). On the other hand, among conquests themselves not all could be seen as equally legitimate. Thus, for example, while Spenser argues that Henry II's conquest of Ireland established the right of English monarches to rule there, the notion is not to be contemplated that any of the subsequent Irish successes in regaining control of some of their land might have returned that right to themselves.[25] Similarly, Elizabeth was called, among other things, the

queen of France (as, for example, in the dedications to both the 1590 and the 1596 editions of The Faerie Queene), in spite of the fact that she had come to the throne after the last vestige of English conquest in France had been reconquered by the French (namely Calais, during her sister Mary's reign). In short, an appeal to the rights of rulership conferred by conquest had to be made in spite of all prior and subsequent history, most especially in spite of any prior or subsequent conquests of that land by one's enemies, and in spite of the rival claims to the right of rulership which these enemies made in virtue of their own conquests. Here, if there ever was one, was a principle where everything lay in the interpretation, and where interpretation followed one's loyalties; indeed, one could say that a certain amount of cleverness was needed in order to make it seem a principle at all.

In spite of their delicacy, both of these topics -- the ambivalence of the right of conquest, and the problems besetting lineal descent -- had to be dealt with repeatedly in recounting the early royal history of Britain as it was reported in the chronicles; and often the two topics were closely intertwined with one another. It required skill on Spenser's part to create, in the tenth canto of Book Two, the general impression that, in the first place, the Trojan Brutus was the conqueror of Britain *par excellence*, from whom the right to rule the

land was ultimately derived, and in the second place, that Elizabeth was his rightful inheritor. More than a general impression of these things, it may not have been possible even for Spenser to create without abandoning his sources altogether.[27]

Clearly enough, Brutus was not the most recent conqueror of England; what made the matter more difficult was that, according to many historians, including Holinshed, neither was he the first. In fact, he was not even the first eponymous conqueror of the whole island, for that distinction went to the giant Albion.[28] Nor was Elizabeth, or for that matter even Arthur, Brutus's lineal descendent, for there were at least two complete breaks in the bloodline before Arthur's time.[29] Spenser solves the first problem by adopting Geoffrey of Monmouth's version of Brutus's arrival (which Holinshed rejects), which says that "At this time the island of Britain... was uninhabited except for a few giants" -- and by so stressing the "beastlinesse" (II.x.9) and uncertain lineage (II.x.8) of these giants that he can dismiss their inhabitation of the island as an "vniust possession" of the land (II.x.9).[30] (Holinshed, in contrast, takes Albion and the other so-called giants to be human beings, of a lineage as clear and at least as noble as Brutus's own, and makes both the giants and the Trojans, in turn, lords over a native Celtic population which had lived there since shortly after the flood.[31])

Furthermore, Spenser ignores the eponymous nature of the giant Albion (whom he mentions at II.x.11) and follows, instead, the tradition which derives "*Albion*", the pre-Trojan name of Britain, from its white cliffs (II.x.6), thus rendering apparently unique the Trojans' affixing of their names to the island and its regions (II.x.12) and so making more convincing the perpetual claim which they thereby stake in it.[32] Indeed, Brutus' conquest of the land is given such primacy of place, and his predecessors are so deprecated, that the very fact of his conquest can be conveniently forgotten, and his descendants' claim to the land treated as if it were aboriginal and therefore incontestable. Thus Spenser can describe the island as "neuer conquered" before the coming of the Romans (II.x.47), which is most convenient in enabling him to deride the Roman conquest -- "(O hideous hunger of dominion)" (II.x.47) -- without this condemnation reflecting badly upon the earlier conquest by the Trojans. (Presumably the Roman conquest had to be derided lest the Roman empire's would-be successor, the Roman Catholic church, should claim rights of conquest in Britain.[33]) Such are the manoeuvres necessary for the storyteller who needs to maintain, within the space of a few stanzas, both that the conquests made by one's own ancestors were glorious and bestowed upon them the rights to the lands which they conquered, and that the conquests made by one's ancestor's enemies were wicked and

conferred upon them nothing but shame.

Somewhat similar techniques are needed for overcoming the second problem with Britain's royal history, namely the breaks in the bloodline. When, after the death of Gorbuduc's sons, which "ended *Brutus* sacred progenie" (II.x.36), "this sad Realme" was "cut into sundry shaires/ By such, as claymd themselues *Brutes* rightfull haires" (II.x.37), some means is needed for suggesting the legitimacy of the warlord who emerges victorious, in order for the subsequent lineage to seem to be a legitimate continuation of the prior one. This Spenser achieves not by trying to show that Donwallo's claim to being Brutus's heir is better than those of his rivals, but by removing from the story all mention of Donwallo's claim to royalty -- (according to Geoffrey he was "The son of Cloten king of Cornwall"[34]) -- and emphasizing his opposition to the other, "miscreate" kings (II.x.38). Thus Donwallo, in fact one pretender among others, seems to rise above the illegitimacy which he opposes in the rest, just as Brutus, one conqueror among others, is set above conquest altogether. In fact, Donwallo's case is very like that of Brutus (as, indeed, Henry VII's was like William I's): for both are, in effect, conquerors of the island, notwithstanding that Donwallo's conquest is from within. In either case, the problem is to derive, from historical instances of *de facto* rulership, the appearance of a rulership *de jure*, which can then be

claimed on behalf of one's own party.

It is this conversion of the *de facto* -- ephemeral, contestable, and founded in strife and bloodshed -- into the eternal and incontestable *de jure*, grounded in peace and law, which, if it is successful, can make the queen's "linage.../ ...though from earth it be deriued right" seem to "stretch forth to heauens hight" (II.x.2). There is, however, a great difficulty involved in deriving an eternal right to rule from the temporal history of rulership. Just as we saw that, after Guyon binds Occasion, his detractors can always find a basis for shameful allegations against him by drawing attention away from Occasion's symbolism and placing emphasis instead on the literal fact that he has bound a helpless old woman, so, however skillfully the impression of an eternal right to rule is drawn from the chronicle history of Britain, there remains in the same history, for would-be detractors, the basis for a quite different interpretation: one which emphasizes the current monarch's entanglement in the problems of conquest and succession rather than setting her above them. For despite the general impression that this canto gives of Elizabeth's right to the throne, its presentation of Britain's royal past remains such that a skeptical reader could readily use it to call into question the very notion that the claim to rule rightfully over England could ever be more than an *ex post facto* rationalization,

such as was made after the failure of Brutus' bloodline by all those who subsequently "claymd themselves *Brutes* rightfull haires" (II.x.37). As with the supposedly noble lineage of Pyrochles and Cymochles, it is all a matter of where an interpreter places the emphasis.

In spite, then, of the narrator's avowed intention to set the queen's lineage above its temporal and earthly origins, both the historical events and the historical record of those events remain connected to their problematic beginnings. This seems to be the reason why the "auncient booke, hight *Briton moniments*", needs to be supplemented by "another booke,/ That hight *Antiquitie* of *Faerie* lond" (II.ix.59-60). Harry Berger has observed that the Faery history differs from its British equivalent chiefly in that "all difficulties are left out, and the good works are made much better".[35] The difficulties that are left out, it may be observed, are principally those concerned with conquest and with lineal descent: for in "*Faerie* lond", conquest is absent, and so are breaks in and contests over the royal lineage (II.x.72ff); even the complications of Elizabeth's inheritance of her father's kingdom have no echo in Gloriana's apparently direct inheritance of the Faerie throne from her father King Oberon, who had, so far as we are told, only one wife and one child (II.x.76).[36] Instead, over "seuen hundred Princes" reign, "in their dew descents", from the dawn of the Elfin civilization

until the time of Gloriana, so that, as if in spite of time and history, their governance attains to a kind of eternity, and the record of their "mightie deedes" to "infinite contents" (II.x.74).[37] Meanwhile, the errors and uncertainties that beset human historiography, and which impede its attempts to immortalize its heroes, also appear to be absent from the Faery chronicle, which unlike its British counterpart makes no mention of any disagreements or lacunae in its sources.

Certainly the account of the Faery Queen's lineage shows how, ideally, that which has earthly beginnings would "it selfe stretch forth to heauens hight" (II.x.2). However, at the same time that the Faery chronicle presents a perfected version of the British one, it throws into stark relief the many imperfections of Elizabeth's lineage, and so furthers the polarization of interpretations of royal history into glorious and inglorious versions. As in the Legend of Temperance generally, the problem is continually before us as we read the queen's lineage whether we are reading of noble or ignoble personages, and of praiseworthy or of shameful deeds. The real difficulty of establishing the praiseworthiness and nobility of Elizabeth's "famous auncestries" is underlined by the ironic fact that even "that heauenly lay" of which the narrator hopes to be granted "some relish" by the Muses in recounting her ancestry, namely the royal history of Olympian Jove

(II.x.3), is fraught with ambiguity on the subjects of conquest and lineage. If there

> Liues ought, that to her linage may compaire
> Which though from earth it be deriued right
> Yet doth it selfe stretch forth to heauens hight,
>
> (II.x.2)

it is certainly the lineage of Jupiter, which quite literally is derived "from earth" (for not only was he born on the earth, but from the race of the Titans whose mother *is* the earth), and which nevertheless literally "doth it selfe stretch forth to heauens hight" (the heavens being the seat of his throne). But while, on one hand, it was possible to treat Jove's achievement of heavenly dominion as a glorious conquest, and one which bestowed on him the eternal right to rule over the whole universe, it was equally possible to see him as but one in a series of usurpers, displacing his tyrannical father only to show an equally tyrannical determination not to be displaced in turn by a son; and, while it was common to contrast Jove and the other celestial gods with the chthonic Titans and Giants against whom they had battled for universal supremacy, it was also possible to point out that the Olympians were themselves but a junior branch of the chthonic family of deities, distinguished not by primacy of birth but only by the fact of their present power.[38] By invoking Phoebus's rendition of Jove's conquest over the Giants as a paradigmatic episode

in royal history making (II.x.3), and then beginning his own royal history with an account of Brutus's similar victory over earth-born giants (II.x.9ff), the narrator draws attention to the essential difficulty of his own task: like those who celebrate Jove as the rightful and eternal king of the universe, he must conjure the unambiguous right to rule from an ambivalent history of seizing and clinging to power. Any success which may be had in such a task will not be of the kind to convince the skeptics; rather, it will be contingent upon a community of interests, and upon a willingness, within this community, to accept a story favourable to its interests wherever real proof is impossible.[39] For like the other distinctions which are thematic in the Legend of Temperance -- the distinctions of inside from outside, figurative from literal, allusion from original -- the distinctions of the heavenly from the earthly, and the noble from the base, are never clear-cut.

However difficult it may be to achieve this separation from earthly origins, a literal or figurative act of rising above the earth is portrayed repeatedly toward the end of the Legend of Temperance as an essential prerequisite to attaining virtue and praiseworthiness.[40] Thus the twelfth canto opens,

> Now gins this goodly frame of Temperance
> Fairely to rise, and her adorned hed
> To pricke of highest praise forth to aduance...
> (II.xii.1).

In the eleventh canto, the necessity of achieving a separation from the earth occurs more concretely, when Arthur, in order to defeat his opponent, Malaeger, must quite literally separate him from his earthly origins:

> He then remembred well, that had bene sayd,
> How th'Earth his mother was, and first him bore;
> She eke so often, as his life decayd,
> Did life with vsury to him restore,
> And raysd him vp much stronger then before,
> So soone as he vnto her wombe did fall;
> Therefore to ground he would him cast no more,
> Ne him commit to graue terrestriall,
> But beare him farre from hope of succour vsuall.
>
> (II.xi.45)

Towards the end of the Legend of Temperance, then, the separation from the earth, whether brought about by Arthur or by the narrator, and whether on behalf of Alma or Guyon or Queen Elizabeth, seems to be the necessary condition for the victory of the virtuous. What is less clear, however, is whether the specific type of virtue which thereby emerges victorious is a satisfactory one.[41] For the crowning act performed under the rubric of this virtue, namely Guyon's capture of Acrasia and his concomitant destruction of the Bower of Bliss, has occasioned a long-running debate among Spenser critics. It is widely agreed that these actions on the part of the knight of temperance at the end of his legend come as a shock to the reader, and that one's inclination is not readily to sympathize with Guyon's "rigour pittilesse" as

he smashes and burns his way through the bower (II.xii.83); there has been persistent disagreement, however, as to whether a reaction of shock and dismay is consistent with an authorial intention of celebrating the virtue of temperance which Guyon represents (in that, by forcing readers to see themselves in the position of Acrasia's victims, who "stared ghastly, some for inward shame,/ And some for wrath, to see their captiue Dame" (II.xii.86), it compels them to confront their own intemperance), or whether, on the contrary, it indicates either a failure on the poet's part to conceive of temperance as something distinct from mere priggishness (or at any rate imaginatively to exemplify this temperance in such a way as to attract the reader's sympathy), or his actual rejection of the virtue of temperance as exemplified by Guyon's actions.[42] I hope, by referring once more to some of the themes which I have been exploring in the second book of The Faerie Queene, to illuminate some of the underlying reasons why the Bower-of-Bliss episode generates this critical dissent.

It seems to me that there are two main reasons why a reader might look unsympathetically upon Guyon's violent response to the Bower of Bliss. The first is that the Bower itself may not seem so thoroughly bad as to warrant the complete and indiscriminate destruction that he wreaks upon it; the second, that Guyon himself seems unsuitable for the role of judge and instrument of

vengeance upon the Bower, in view of his own apparent culpability in what he so harshly condemns. I shall examine this second point first.

Although the sheer scale of Guyon's violence at the end of the twelfth canto is without precedent, violence itself is not a new feature of his response to the Bower. Rather, physical destructiveness has been one of three responses among which he has oscillated since arriving at the entrance to the place (II.xii.49; see also II.xii.57), the other two being the same kind of passive resistance to its charms as characterized his defense against the temptations of Mammon (II.xii.53), and -- at moments -- an apparent willingness to succumb to the Bower's delights (II.xii.69). It seems artificial, then, to treat the final and comprehensive act of destruction in isolation, as if it represents a clear departure from his prior responses.[43] On the contrary, physical suppression of what he finds in the Bower has been part of Guyon's reaction to the Bower from the beginning, alongside the psychological suppression of his desire to indulge in it.

The close relation of Guyon's physical and psychological resistance as he moves through the Bower is greatly accentuated by the symbolic nature of the place and of its inhabitants, particularly of its mistress Acrasia. Just as self-commentary within the poem periodically identifies the maiden Una with the abstract

quality of "Truth" (I.ii.Arg.), the wizard Archimago with "Hypocrisie" (I.i.Arg.), and so on, so, in the same way, Acrasia is twice referred to as "Pleasure" (II.xii.1, II.xii.48). Like these other characters, then, Acrasia is a personification. Literally, she is the seductress whom Guyon must capture in order to fulfil his mission on behalf of the Faery Queen and to avenge the death of Amavia; figuratively, she is the pleasure toward which he is naturally inclined as a human being and which he must learn to restrain, within himself, in order to fulfil his moral potential and so to become the truly temperate man.[44] Because she is both a person and a psychological state, the challenge which she poses is both an external and an internal one: she exemplifies temptation in the sense in which one person tempts another, and personifies it in the sense in which a person feels tempted from within. But unlike, for example, the episode in which Guyon binds Occasion, no clear distinction is made in the Bower-of-Bliss scene between the literal and figurative significance of Guyon's actions. On one hand, there is no Atin or Pyrochles to call attention to the literal fact that he binds an unarmed woman, or to deride the act as unchivalrous. But, on the other hand, neither does the Palmer, as he did in that earlier scene, spell out for Guyon the figurative meaning of this encounter; so it is not clear whether Guyon, or even the Palmer, is aware of Acrasia's figurative significance, or, if they are

aware of it, whether their actions are directed against her *qua* pleasure, in the way that their previous actions were directed against their opponents *qua* occasion and furor. Accordingly, in reading the twelfth canto, we hover undecidedly between seeing Guyon's actions as the response to an external and to an internal enemy; and both the scenery of the Bower, and Guyon's reactions to it, come across as indeterminately either physical or psychological. For the characters involved in this scene, and particularly for Guyon himself, there seems to be no clear distinction between the literal and the figurative meanings of their actions: for him, it appears, binding Acrasia *is* the act of restraining his own sensual appetite. His attack upon her is a suppressing both of his own desires, and of their physical objects.[45] Meanwhile, the rational restraint upon Guyon's inclinations seems also to stem indeterminately from an internal and an external source; for, during his passage through the Bower, he can at one time exercise self-governance, "Bridling his will, and maistering his might" (II.xii.53), but at another time, needs to be governed by the Palmer (II.xii.69), as if we were passing back and forth, without warning, between an external landscape in which Guyon is a whole man complete with both appetites and reason, and an internal one in which Guyon and the Palmer represent Appetite and Reason respectively in the manner of a psychomachia. In two

different respects, then, we are presented, in the Bower, with a scenery wherein the respective meanings of psychological and physical restraint cannot be kept separate, because the distinctions between inside and outside cannot be clearly established.

This lack of a firm boundary between the inside and outside of things, a familiar feature of Spenser's imaginary world in the Legend of Temperance, particularly in relation to the continence of the body, is thematic also in the imagery of the Bower of Bliss. The "fence" by the which the Bower is "enclosed round about" turns out to be "but weake and thin", and its "gate", similarly, to be "wrought of substaunce light,/ Rather for pleasure, then for battery or fight" (II.xii.43); indeed, it "euer open stood to all" (II.xii.46). Similarly, a second "gate", apparently dividing the Bower into inner and outer enclosures, turns out to be "No gate" at all, but only "like one", being no more, in reality, than a cleverly shaped hedge (II.xii.53). More hedges, or "couert groues, and thickets close", interpose themselves between Guyon and Acrasia, but these too present no real barrier to one willing to go "creeping" through them (II.xii.76). Such false barriers in the landscaping of the Bower, which make no more than a pretense of denying Guyon entry, have an analogy, in the realm of vision, in the various types of veils sported by some of its female inhabitants, which only pretend to

conceal their wearers' bodies from Guyon's sight. Thus, through the waters of the fountain, "as through a vele", the "snowy limbes" of the damsels who play in it "appeared plaine" (II.xii.64), and the one damsel's subsequent use of her hair as a "mantle" is calculated not to prevent but to encourage his ogling of her (II.xii.67-8): as the song says, "the Virgin Rose... fairer seemes, the lesse ye see her may" (II.xii.74). A short while later, Acrasia herself is seen

> ...arayd, or rather disarayd,
> All in a vele of silke and siluer thin,
> That hid no whit her alablaster skin...
>
> (II.xii.77).

Such false barriers to sight have for Guyon the same effect that Cymochles achieved for himself, when he was dallying in the Bower, by pretending to close his own eyelids: by stealing glimpses of what, in fact, was freely revealed, he made the sight of the damsels more enticing (II.v.34). The notion, which Cymochles cultivates, that the Bower's pleasures are forbidden, is a third type of false barrier which recurs in the depiction of the place. Thus, for example, the song which is sung at the appearance of Acrasia describes love as a "crime" not in order to dissuade would-be lovers but, rather, further to encourage them to "Gather the Rose of loue" (II.xii.75).[46]

All these false boundaries to desire, which actually

serve only to encourage their own breaching, seem analogous to the false boundary, in the scene as a whole, between the psychological and the physical realms, which similarly encourages a failure to separate desire from action, and, for that matter, to separate the restraint of desire from the physical restraint of the object of desire. From this perspective, it might indeed be argued that Guyon is implicated in that which he condemns to destruction.

I return now to the other reason why a reader might look unsympathetically upon Guyon's violent response to the Bower of Bliss, namely, that the Bower itself may not seem so thoroughly bad as to warrant the complete and indiscriminate destruction that he wreaks upon it. Such a judgement may be made on a variety of bases. One of these -- and one which I shall leave aside because it is not a criticism of the poem *per se*, but of the man or the period that produced it -- is that it might be thought that Spenser's conception of temperance amounts to priggishness by the standards of another age, be it Romantic or modern, and that he ought rather to have celebrated the kind of sensuality which he condemns in his account of the Bower of Bliss. But there are other possible bases, as well, for feeling aggrieved at Guyon's razing of the Bower, and ones which are grounded in the description of the place itself. First, the symbolic identification of Acrasia with Pleasure (II.xii.1,48)

does not clearly establish her as evil. Pleasure, including sensual pleasure, is not an unqualified evil for Spenser, as his celebration of it in the Garden of Adonis passage (III.vi.50-1) amply demonstrates, and as might well have been brought to an Elizabethan reader's attention in the account of the Bower itself through its being compared to the Garden of Eden, since the name Eden had long been identified with the Greek *hedone*, 'pleasure', and had even been translated as such in the Vulgate's "*paradisium voluptatis*" (Genesis 2.8).[47] Second, while the Bower does display several notable examples of the intemperate and the over-wrought, some of its most appealing features are described in terms of the virtue of temperance itself; for example, "the milde aire" (II.xii.51) and the harmonious music (II.xii.71) which fill the place are both carefully "attempred", and indeed, everything "intemperate" is excluded from the climate of the place (II.xii.51).

With regard to the temperance apparently exemplified by such features of the garden, various attempts have been made to explain it away, and to show that such temperance is not really temperance, or, at any rate, is not temperance in the moral sense.[48] But even climactic temperance cannot be clearly distinguished from its moral namesake in a garden wherein the boundary between physical and psychological is itself ultimately indistinguishable. Any attempt to see the descriptions

of the temperateness of the Bower, such as it is, as beside the moral point, presumes, it seems to me, that the narrative voice describing the bower is unreliable in much the way that Atin and the brothers Pyrochles and Cymochles were unreliable in repeatedly claiming for themselves the chivalric virtues to which they were in fact opposed. If this is the case, then the Bower-of-Bliss episode marks a new development in the legend's exploration of the involvement of interpretation in perceptions of the praiseworthiness and shamefulness of deeds; for here it is the narrator himself who misinterprets the shameful as praiseworthy. Such a misrepresentation of the intemperate as temperate would be comparable to the narrator's gross error in the fifth canto of the first book, where he misrepresented the faithless as faithful (see Chapter One, pp. 167-9).[49] If this is so, then it seems to me an illuminating piece of information with respect to the theory that Spenser deliberately shocks readers with Guyon's destruction of the Bower in order to reveal their own complicity in the intemperance of the place; for it would suggest that the reader's culpability is, in fact, actively cultivated through the coloured perception of the place which we receive through the narrator's description.

With regard to the moral ambivalence of pleasure, the general means of establishing the culpability of the pleasure condemned in the Bower is to contrast it with

the pleasure celebrated in the Garden of Adonis. The main difference between the two places, it is noted, is the lack of a generative principle in the Bower, which in contrast to the fecundity of the Garden of Adonis, is essentially sterile.[50] Thus, for example, the Genius of the Bower bears a cup and staff, but only "for more formalitee" (II.xii.48), not as genuine symbols of sexual potency, and whereas his counterpart in the Garden of Adonis is a hermaphrodite in the genuine sense of having both sexes (III.vi.31), he is a hermaphrodite only in the euphemistic sense of being effeminate (II.xii.46). To take another example, Acrasia's transforming of men into beasts and expelling them from the bower is but a pale prefiguration of the generative symbolism of Venus' continual transformations of Adonis, and of the sending of babies out of the garden into the world (III.vi.47,32-33). But the basis of the Garden's fertility, it ought to be noted, is its grounding in the chthonic energy of "An huge eternall *Chaos*, which supplyes/ The substances of natures fruitfull progenyes" (III.vi.36). There is no mention of such a corresponding chthonic energy at work in the Bower of Bliss. This, it would seem, is a strange basis on which to distinguish the goodness of the Garden from the badness of the Bower: for to this point in the poem, the deities associated with the earth have been the ultimate champions not of good, but of evil (as recently as the Malaeger episode --

II.xi.45); and in this book in particular, the separation from the earthly has been one of the major goals of the virtuous, and has been an insistent theme in its closing cantos, in particular. Now, it would appear, the basis on which we deem the pleasures of the Bower to be bad is precisely their disconnection from the earthly forces from which the virtue of temperance has been at such pains to detach itself. In this respect, the Bower-of-Bliss episode seems to stand, as it were, on a fault line between the values which have been built up through the Legend of Temperance and those which will emerge to topple them, quite suddenly and quite to Guyon's surprise (III.i.6-7), at the opening of the Legend of Chastity.

The rough transition, in the first canto of Book Three, from the story of the knight of temperance to that of the knight of chastity, provides one more important reason why a reader of The Faerie Queene might be dubious about the virtue of temperance as exemplified by Guyon. Whereas the meeting between Guyon and Redcross in the opening canto of Book Two is an occasion for praise which reinforces and re-emphasizes the value of the Redcross knight's accomplishment, the comparable meeting of Guyon and Britomart is marked by the opposite: not by Guyon's praise but by his "shame" (III.i.7), a shame which is actually given added emphasis by the commentary of the narrator (III.i.8). This is a remarkable way to be displaced from the centre of the poem's action for a hero

to whom the interpretation of his deeds as praiseworthy or shameful has been so important. Critics who have been prompted, by Guyon's "fall" (III.i.6), and by the apparent intemperance with which he is prepared to respond to it (III.i.9), to wonder just how secure was the "goodly frame of Temperance" which was so recently seen "to rise" (II.xii.1), have taken this opening action of the third book as a reason to cast a critical glance backward over Guyon's deeds, particularly at the way in which he fulfils his mission in the Bower of Bliss.[51] These deeds, as we have seen, then turn out to be susceptible to the negative interpretation which such critics proceed to make of them, for some of the reasons that I have been discussing. What I want to emphasize at this point, though, is something else, namely the very fact that the poem sends readers of the third book back to the events of the second, to review the significance of these events in the light of Guyon's subsequent "shame". Such a response on the part of readers enacts the very theme which, I have argued, is central to the Legend of Temperance, namely the troubling susceptibility of deeds to radically different interpretations, on one hand as praiseworthy, on the other as shameful. The point, I think, is not that Guyon's actions in the Bower of Bliss are *necessarily* shameful -- for as a lively critical debate has shown, the opposite interpretation is also defensible [52] -- but that they are *susceptible* to

shameful interpretation. At the root of this susceptibility is the fact that his deeds do not receive the same kind of endorsement from his fellow knights as do the deeds of his predecessor in the legend of holiness. Instead, by delaying his return to Faery Court, where the praiseworthiness of his deeds could be ratified, in order "To make more triall of his hardiment,/ And seeke aduentures" (III.i.2), he shows that he has lost sight of the indispensability of good report to good deeds, and ends up winning, through the further "triall" of his prowess, not further praise, but unaccustomed "shame": "For neuer yet, sith warlike armes he bore/.../ He found himselfe dishonored so sore" (III.i.7). Guyon's failure to learn the lesson so often stressed by the events of his book has a large part to play in making the legend portraying the virtue of temperance among the most ambiguous in The Faerie Queene. This ambiguity, for all the furor it occasions among critics over whether Guyon's actions are meant to be construed as praiseworthy or shameful, may itself be the thematic point.

Notes to Chapter 2: The Legend of Temperance

[1] Alastair Fowler (1964) 85.

[2] Woodhouse, in Essential Articles for the Study of Edmund Spenser, ed. Hamilton, p.590, n.17.

[3] Heale 50.

[4] Heale 59-60 (with reservations); see also the view of Tonkin 97.

[5] Tonkin 99 notes the devotion to his mission which Guyon shows in this exchange. Regarding the contrast between Books One and Two more generally, see Meyer 51, who observes that whereas "Redcrosse must learn to *become* holy... Guyon must learn to *maintain* temperance".

[6] See for example Hamilton's summary of critical responses, in The Faerie Queene p. 168; for more recent critical views, see, for example, Silberman (p. 20) who finds Guyon's response to the Bower inadequate, and Roberts (pp. 66-7) who sees the chaining of Acrasia as just one of several embarrassing activities in which Guyon finds himself engaged throughout Book Two.

[7] In The Faerie Queene II.i.27n.

[8] As Thomas Warton observes (qtd. Variorum Spenser, vol. 2, p. 190).

[9] As noted, for example, by C. S. Lewis (1967) 138.

[10] See also Earle B. Fowler 47.

[11] See, in contrast to Atin's reading of this genealogy, that of Heale 57-8.

[12] The latter point is made by Hamilton, in The Faerie Queene II.iv.45.2-7n; see also Roberts 67.

[13] Quest of the Holy Grail *passim*; see for example pp. 61-71. See also Introduction (1), pp. 43-5.

[14] Compare, for example, the assessment of R. E. Neil Dodge (qtd. Variorum vol. 2, p. 184), to the more recent appraisals of Silberman 13, Webster (1981) 43, Berger (1991) 45.

[15] For example James Russell Lowell & Herbert E. Cory (qtd. Variorum vol. 2, p. 286-7); more recently, Gohlke 124, Silberman 9 & 16, Tonkin 100.

[16] See also Berger (1957) 201.

[17] See also Miller's discussion (pp. 179-82) of the continual repetition, in the description of the House of Alma, of the gesture of purging the earthly or fleshly.

[18] See also the assessments of Phantastes made by Berger (1957) 85 and Miller 185.

[19] Merritt Y. Hughes (qtd. Variorum vol. 2., p. 219).

[20] Phaedria's allusion to the sermon on the mount is praised by John Upton but condemned by John Jortin (Variorum vol. 2, p. 246); among modern critics, the allusion is noted, for example, by Heale 60.

[21] As noted by Miller 191.

[22] See Miller 192.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Stephen Booth 43, and (more generally) 40-45; see also Levy 167-8.

[25] A View of the Present State of Ireland, p. 9.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Whether Spenser would have *wished* to do so is, of course, another matter; certainly some modern critics have seen this history as intentionally demonstrating, not the glory of Britain's royal past, but rather the very opposite, namely the "intransigence" of historical facts to moral interpretation (Berger (1957) 103) or of human nature itself to moral improvement (Gohlke 139). For a considerably more positive assessment of the success of the announced project of glorifying Elizabeth by means of the recitation of British royal history, see Christian 73.

[28] Holinshed, vol. 1, p. 432.

[29] As Spenser's account indicates (II.x.36,54); noted, for example, by Gohlke 131.

[30] Geoffrey's version, p. 72; Holinshed's rejection of it, vol. 1, p.437.

[31] Albion's humanity and lineage, vol. 1, p. 432; the Celts, vol. 1, pp. 428-437.

[32] What is more, Spenser stresses the original namelessness of the island, "as though earning and then 'blazoning' an imperial name were the crowning moments in that long labor through which 'warlike Britons... haue their mightie empire raysd.'" (Miller 193-4).

[33] There was a ready association in sixteenth-century Protestant minds between the ancient Roman empire and modern Roman church, as shown, for example, in the anti-papist rhetoric deployed against the classically-oriented British history of the Italian Polydore Vergil (Levy 64), and in the Geneva Bible's reading of Revelation 17:3 ("I sawe a woman sit vpon a skarlat coloured beast...") as an indication that the modern Catholic church was the inheritor of the ancient empire's bloodthirsty hunger for dominion ("The beast signifieth the antient Rome: the woman that sitteth thereon, the newe Rome which is the Papistrie, whose crueltie and blood sheding is declared by skarlat").

[34] Geoffrey 88.

[35] Berger (1957) 110.

[36] As noted by Thomas Warton (qtd. Variorum vol. 2, p. 335).

[37] Miller 206 notes this "timeless" quality of the Faery chronicles, "despite their temporal organization".

[38] See also Chapter One, pp. 209-11, and compare, generally, the respective treatments of Zeus in Hesiod's Theogony and Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound.

[39] See also Miller 197-8 on Spenser's awareness of the probable fabulousness of the Brutus legend, and the functional justification of repeating the tale as history.

[40] Miller 191.

[41] Or indeed, whether it ever genuinely emerges at all -- see Gohlke 129-30, Silberman 16-17.

[42] See Hamilton's summary of this debate, in The Faerie Queene p. 168, and more recently, Greenblatt 173 *ff*, Silberman 18-20, Esolen 75, and Tonkin 107.

[43] As Hamilton seems to do, in The Faerie Queene II.xii.53.5n.

[44] Hieatt 26-8 usefully reminds critics of the former aspect of Guyon's mission, but insists on it rather too much to the exclusion of the latter.

[45] A comparable point resides in Greenblatt's interpretation of Guyon's violence as reminiscent of the "colonial violence inflicted upon the Irish [which] is at the same time the force that fashions the identity of the English" (188).

[46] Thus Paglia (1990) 190: "the presence of moral law or taboo intensifies the pleasure of sexual transgression and the luxury of evil". For Greenblatt (p. 172), this threatened appropriation of criminality as merely an instrument of pleasure is precisely what makes the Bower so dangerous in the first place to the society that Guyon represents, and which necessitates its total and pitiless destruction.

[47] See Hamilton, in The Faerie Queene II.xii.52n.

[48] For example, John Hollander 238, Hamilton in The Faerie Queene II.xii.51.8n.

[49] See also Dees 565, who argues that there is "a pattern... in Book II, analogous to that in Book I, in which the responses of the titular hero to his experience are paralleled by the responses of the narrator to the story".

[50] Lewis (1936) 326.

[51] For example Hamilton, in The Faerie Queene p. 168, and Silberman 20.

[52] See Hamilton's summary of critical views in The Faerie Queene p. 168; recent defenders of the propriety of Guyon's action include Esolen 75 and Tonkin 107.

Chapter Three:

The Legend of Chastity -- Crossing the Line

In the third book of The Faerie Queene, there is a new relationship between reports and the characters whose deeds are reported: in one case after another, the report itself either actually *precedes*, or else in some other significant way *takes precedence over*, the characters or the deeds that are the subjects of the report. The clearest examples of this, though by no means the only ones, are the actual instances of prophecy, as when Proteus predicts the future woes that will befall Marinell (III.iv.25), or when Merlin gives Britomart a detailed account of a career that she has not yet had (III.iii.28), and a history of her descendents who have not yet lived (III.iii.29-50). There are, in addition, several cases where reports are not presented as prophecies *per se*, but which nevertheless have a certain prophetic character, in that the things reported are not *yet* true, but *will be* true at some later point in time -- as when Britomart declares an intention literally

to do battle with Arthegall (III.ii.8,16), long before there is any prospect of such a literal confrontation coming to pass (as finally happens in the 1596 installment of the poem, IV.vi.11*ff*), or when Florimell hears that Marinell has been gravely injured or killed, days before his injury can actually have taken place (III.v.10). Finally, there are the cases in which the *way* that something is reported takes a kind of precedence over the thing itself, as when Britomart's false description of herself as having been "trained vp in warlike stowre" (III.ii.6) accounts better for her current martial prowess than the more conventional facts of her feminine upbringing (indicated by III.iii.53,57), or when Britomart's quest seems to have a more worthy goal in the reports and images that she encounters of Arthegall than in the character himself whom they supposedly reflect (see Introduction (2), pp. 127-9).[1] Even in these cases, there tends to be a sense in which the report takes *temporal* precedence over what is reported: thus, for readers, Britomart's false report of her upbringing (III.ii.6) precedes the revelation of the truth (III.iii.53), and the reports and images which draw her toward Arthegall (III.ii.9-14,24-5, III.iii.24-7) long precede his appearance in the poem's action (IV.iv.39).

There is another sense, too, in which the usual relationship between events and reports is reversed in

the Legend of Chastity. In all the cases that I have cited, the report, because it comes in advance of the event itself, can actually influence the event, and so, to a degree, becomes the cause and original of what it purports merely to describe. Cymoent, misinterpreting Proteus' prophecy as an indication that it is love, rather than war, which poses a danger to Marinell's life, cautions her son "womens loue to hate", but relaxes her earlier warnings to him "to forbeare/ The bloudie battell", and so leaves him exposed to the very fate which she has tried to avert (III.iv.24-7). Florimell's hearing about the injury to Marinell prompts her to leave Faery Court (III.v.10), and so, by making possible the encounter which separates Britomart from Guyon and Arthur (III.i.15-19), contributes to the course of events which leaves Britomart alone on the strand to encounter Marinell and deliver the fated blow (III.iv.12-18). Britomart's advance knowledge of her own destiny leads to her decision to go abroad disguised in armour (III.iii.51*ff*), and to this degree makes possible not only the foretold marriage to Arthegall but her prophesied chivalric career as well. Her description of herself as a practised warrior and her account in martial terms of her relationship with Arthegall contribute to the development of her own sense, and of the reader's, that she is a female knight in fact rather than merely a maiden disguised in armour, and so help to make possible

their eventual encounter in chivalric combat. Finally, the glowing reports which Britomart receives of Arthegall's character affect all subsequent perceptions of him, by herself (IV.vi.26,29) and by the reader, and so lead to her acceptance of his marriage suit (IV.vi.41), in spite of the apparent deficiencies of character that he displays once he has appeared *in propria persona*.

If, as I have argued, advance reports of this kind can actually have an effect upon the subsequent development of the characters and events upon which they comment, then the issuing of such a report has to be seen as an act of considerable power and influence. Accordingly, the question of *who* reports on events, and consequently whose interest is reflected in the version of events reported, takes on a greater importance than ever. I shall argue that, in the third book of The Faerie Queene, Britomart herself, in spite of the extent to which fate initially appears to prescribe the course of her future, assumes an ever-increasing power over the advance reporting of her own character and deeds, together with an ever-increasing ability to live up to the report that she gives of herself, and thereby ultimately surpasses the "streight" bounds of the "heauenly destiny" (III.iii.24) to which it seems at first that she can only submit (III.iii.25); her control over this kind of advance reporting will reach its zenith at the end of Book Three and will be sustained into the

opening episode of Book Four. I shall show, too, how this power which Britomart assumes is closely bound up with her control over the doubleness of meaning within a world replete with symbols.

The beginning of Britomart's story is marked by a comprehensive loss of control over her own life. Not only has she "no powre/ Nor guidance of her selfe" by which to resist the sway of her newly felt love for Arthegall (III.ii.49), but even the apparent chance which has brought about her plight turns out to have been no chance at all, "But the streight course of heauenly destiny" (III.iii.24). The sense of Britomart's own powerlessness is augmented by the cooperation, amongst themselves, of the forces which control her. In the version of her life propounded by Merlin, what might seem to be the distinct influences of "fortune" (III.ii.44), "Imperious Loue" (III.ii.23), and "eternall prouidence" (III.iii.24), are resolved into a coherent set of forces; while Merlin himself, upon whom she relies for his privileged access to knowledge of her future, and who assumes as well a position of moral authority in advising her to "submit" to the fate that he describes (III.iii.24), is also, himself, one of the agents of the destiny which he describes to her and exalts: for he is the one who made, and who gave to Britomart's father, the "glassie globe" which was instrumentally responsible for Britomart's falling in love in the first place

(III.ii.21). Even her very decision to consult the magician can be cited as an instance of her "having fate obayd", and the failure of her attempt to disguise herself held up, by implication, as an instance of the futility of trying to evade her destiny (III.iii.19). Against this dauntingly united front, it seems that Britomart must indeed be powerless to resist.

Britomart is, of course, offered a consolation for her lack of choice, namely that the destiny which the "heauens have ordaynd" for her (III.iii.26) is, if inescapable, at any rate not "ill" (III.iii.24) -- at least by Merlin's reckoning. On the contrary, the man whom she is compelled "To loue", and eventually to be married to, is, according to the wizard, "the prowest knight, that euer was" (III.iii.24), "And for his warlike feates renowmed is,/ From where the day out of the sea doth spring,/ Vntill the closure of the Euening" (III.iii.27). Furthermore, she is told, "from thy wombe a famous Progenie/ Shall spring," of "Renowmed kings, and sacred Emperours" (III.iii.22-3). Indeed, Britomart does take some "hope of comfort glad" (III.iii.51) from all of this, particularly when she hears Arthegall's reputation reaffirmed from another quarter (III.ii.11). But there is, at the same time, a sense in which this emphasis on the qualities of her husband- and children-to-be only emphasizes further the comprehensiveness of her own subordination: for as mother of kings, her role is

pictured as passive -- she is conceived of as the earth in which "that Tree" must be "enrooted" which will bring forth her "fruitfull Ofspring" (III.iii.22-3) -- while even in her more active role as a knight who "in armes shall beare great sway" (III.iii.28), her place will be merely to lend "aid" to Arthegall's "mighty puissance", and with her own "prow valiaunce/ ...t'increase [her] louers pray" (III.iii.28). Ultimately, like all the forces that delineate her destiny, Arthegall is presented as a more worthy cause and a superior power, to whose "will" she must learn to "submit" (III.iii.24).

The subordination of a woman's destiny to that of her husband is perhaps to be expected in an Elizabethan poem (although the alternative is by no means unthinkable, as Britomart's own adventures will demonstrate); what is perhaps more striking about Merlin's prophecy is that it is far from clear that either Arthegall himself or the future history of their offspring is to be genuinely worthy of Merlin's superlatives. This becomes clear very quickly, even to Britomart herself, of the "Famous progenie" in whom she is told to take comfort. Not only is their status as "kings" and "Emperours" to be dubiously established by an opportunistic act of usurpation (III.iii.29), but the glory of their rule will be marred by Norwegian invasions which will leave the "sad people" of Britain "vtterly fordonne" and cowering in the mountains (III.iii.34), and their power finally

consumed by "plagues and murrins pestilent" (III.iii.40) and given over to the Saxons (III.iii.41), not to be restored until they have endured centuries of "thraldome" (III.iii.44). In short, it is to be no more straightforwardly glorious a history than that of the *prior* British succession, up to the time of Arthur (see Chapter Two, pp.259-69).[2] Arthegall himself seems equally to be overpraised in Merlin's sweeping assessment of him, although Britomart herself is not yet in a position to know this. Indeed, it seems that the reports which Britomart hears of Arthegall, both from Merlin and from the Redcross knight, have less to do with the reality which she (and we) will eventually encounter than with feeding the stuff of wish fulfillment to her own "feigning fancie" (III.iv.5). Even the figure which she sees in Merlin's mirror seems to be less an image of the real Arthegall than what Glauce astutely calls "the semblant pleasing most your mind" (III.ii.40).[3] In sum, any consolation which she derives from these representations must be dubiously founded. At worst, what Merlin offers to Britomart as a consolation might be seen, not as a genuine attempt to appraise the desirability for her of the future that he predicts, but rather as a calculated supplement to his already formidable exercise of control over her: for by telling her, not the truth, but what will be most pleasing for her to hear, he encourages Britomart actively to pursue

the very destiny which he has described as inescapable, and so exerts an influence in favour of the outcome which he has predicted, much as other advance reports in the Legend of Chastity (such as Proteus's prophecy concerning Marinell) can be seen actively to contribute to things' eventually turning out as foretold.

Even apart from the question of the reliability of the reports which Britomart is given of her future, it will be allowed, I think, that a life which is so thoroughly determined in advance that the only real choice left to the one who must live it is between submission and futile resistance, might seem an oppressive prospect even if its content is apparently enviable. The motive, then, would be understandable if Britomart, as soon as she departs from Merlin's presence, where knowledge of her is comprehensive, intrusive, and wholly integrated into a determinate plan, were to begin pursuing means to *evade* being known, and devices which would allow her to *multiply* her meanings as a character -- if she sought, in short, a degree of power over her own affairs.[4] The first sign that Britomart is not ready to "submit" to "the streight course of heauenly destiny" (III.ii.24) is her immediate recourse to "secret counsell" with her nurse, so that they can discuss plans "to maske in strange disguise" (III.iii.51) in their journey to Faerie Land; this, in spite of the chastisement which they have already suffered at Merlin's

hands (III.iii.19) for supposing that they would be capable of "disguising" themselves from him by means of "straunge/ And base attyre" (III.iii.7). For Britomart and Glauce, the lesson appears to have been, not that disguises or other means of evading being known are futile, but that a *better* disguise is needed than the one which they tried on Merlin (III.iii.52-3).

The key to this better disguise turns out to lie in history, and more specifically, in an alternative view of history to the one which Merlin has propounded: one which focuses upon women, rather than upon men, as the prime source of inspiration to action. Glauce's brief catalogue of female warriors, culminating in the "Faire *Angela*", eponymous leader of the Anglo-Saxons (III.iii.54-7), subtly subverts a number of the established norms of historical report in The Faerie Queene, and in doing so establishes a quite different basis for action than the one that Merlin has insisted upon.

Glauce's main point -- that, in history, there have been women as well as men who have performed "feats aduenturous" (III.iii.54) -- is not, in itself, liable to seem striking to a reader of The Faerie Queene; for not only is the point a conventional one, which Ariosto, for example, had developed at considerable length in the Orlando Furioso (xxxvii.1-23; Harington's translation, xxxvii.1-15), but it has also been anticipated, and quite

recently, by the narrator of The Faerie Queene itself (III.ii.1-2). But Glauce, in pressing women's martial history into active service *within* the story, as an example for the would-be heroine of Book Three to emulate, does something that the narrator of the poem cannot; and in this sense, Glauce realizes a subversive potential which the narrator can only indicate.

Glauce's appeal to women's martial history begins relatively innocuously, with a general description of women as having performed martial deeds "in paragone of proudest men" (III.iii.54): women who take up arms are portrayed as assuming a role that does not properly belong to them, in imitation of the male sex, to whom the role is presumably natural. By implication, Britomart herself, should she "disguize" herself "in feigned armes" as Glauce suggests (III.iii.53), would likewise be doing so "in paragone of... men". But after enumerating a few conventional historical instances of "women valorous" (III.iii.54), Glauce passes on to a detailed report of a single female warrior whose deeds she claims to have witnessed at first hand, and to whom any attempts to equal the prowess of male knights would clearly be irrelevant: on the contrary, faced with the Saxon queen Angela, it is all that the male contingent ranged against her can do to equal *her* (III.iii.55); while she herself not only "hath the leading of a Martiall/ And mighty people", but is herself the object of this people's

emulation, in that they "do for her sake/ And loue, themselues of her name *Angles* call" (III.iii.56). As Angela's example looms larger in Glauce's story, so the notion that Britomart might take up arms "in paragone of... men" gives way to the more radical idea that she might take "Aduent'rous knighthood on her selfe" in imitation of Angela herself (III.iii.56-7); and no sooner has this happened than Angela's own armour turns out, conveniently enough, to be available for the purpose (III.iii.58).

The Anglo-Saxon Queen can serve as a better role model for Britomart than any man, not only by virtue of her superior skill at arms, but also because she displays this supposedly masculine skill without compromising to any degree the specifically feminine excellence of her beauty: she is, as Glauce puts it, "No whit lesse faire than terrible in fight" (III.iii.56). Learning to emulate this ability to claim the traditionally male powers without relinquishing the traditionally female ones will be a crucial part of Britomart's acquisition of control over events in the third book of The Faerie Queene (see especially III.ix.21*ff*, IV.i.9-15 -- both to be discussed in more detail a little later).

Another part of Angela's legacy which Britomart inherits -- and the one which is potentially the most subversive of all -- is her ability to erase the signs of prior conquests. In the chronicles of British history

that we encountered in Alma's castle (II.ix.59-x.69), conquest is treated as an act which confers a permanent claim to a land, a claim which survives, most graphically, in the names attached to the land by its eponymous conquerors: in this case, by Brutus, his lieutenants, and his sons (II.x.12-14). Care is taken, in these chronicles, not to allow the uniqueness (and hence the permanency and the incontestability) of the rights of conquest to come into question, as for example by allowing the name Albion, which had been Britain's name prior to Brutus' conquest, to be derived from its prior possessors, or by speaking of these prior possessors as earlier conquerors (II.x.6-11; see Chapter Two, pp. 262-3). But in Glauce's appeal to history, such caution is thrown to the wind. Angela, the eponymous leader of the Angles -- that is to say, of the original 'English'[5] -- is, by implication, responsible for the superseding by the modern name 'England' of the earlier place-name, "*Logris*", derived from the name of Brutus's son "*Locrine*" (II.x.13-14), and so for erasing one of the principal signs, not only of the Trojans' conquest, but also of their descendents' claim to the land. So Britomart, in choosing to emulate Angela's "ensample" (III.iii.56), associates herself with an important enemy of the British succession, the propagation of which (so she has been told by Merlin) is the very cause to which "eternall prouidence" (III.iii.24) has preordained her

life. What is more, she begins, immediately, to imitate the very kind of subversion that makes Angela's "ensample" so dangerous: for in taking Angela's armour down from the wall where her father, King Ryence, has displayed it in order to commemorate the success of a recent British "forray" against the Saxons (III.iii.58), she erases a sign whose function is very similar to that intended by the conquerors who give their names to the lands that they win -- that is, to stand "for endlesse moniments/ Of his successe and gladfull victory" (III.iii.59). Britomart, in pressing this armour back into service, "vnweeting to her Sire" (III.iii.57), converts it from the sign of a man's control over a female warrior into precisely the opposite: a sign of a woman's evasion of a man's control. If Britomart can put back into action what her father had intended as "endlesse moniments" of his own superiority, then what sign or story is so fixed that it cannot be turned to a new purpose? Or who is to say, now, that even the story of Britomart's future as told by Merlin cannot be similarly subverted to her own ends?

Once Britomart has donned Angela's armour, and Glauce "Another harnesse, which did hang thereby" (III.iii.61), they must depart in secret, "through back wayes, that none might them espy,/ Couered with secret cloud of silent night" (III.iii.61) -- for her father, it is assumed, would not approve of Britomart's going abroad

without protection, particularly as she is "his onely daughter and his hayre" (III.ii.22), and the one, therefore, whom he, as much as Merlin, counts upon for the propagation of a royal line. Their successful evasion of King Ryence's detection, in spite of his having at his disposal Merlin's "looking glasse", which is supposed to reveal to him "What euer foe had wrought, or frend had faynd" (III.ii.18-19), is the first of many incidents in Book Three in which a man's attempt to govern the movements of women is thwarted, and the boundaries that he has tried to establish for them crossed -- the first, that is, unless we apply these terms figuratively, and speak of Britomart's already having begun, with her taking on of the armour and the "ensample" of the Saxon queen Angela, to cross the boundaries set up for her by the destiny that Merlin declared for her. It is also the first time in The Faerie Queene that "night", with its quality of rendering things "secret" and unknown, has been quite so clearly propitious to one of the poem's heroes.[6] (Even in the Redcross Knight's three-day battle with the dragon, in which the hours of darkness serve as time for healing, the emphasis is upon the revival brought about at dawn, and so upon the reappearance of "ioyous day" rather than upon the "noyous night" through which he lies unconscious and hidden from Una's sight (I.xi.50-1).) The helpfulness of night in facilitating Britomart's secret

departure initiates a kind of debate, running through the third book of the poem, over the relative merits of night and day, and more particularly, over the merits of their respective qualities of fostering ambiguity and clarity.

As we watch Britomart and Glauce escape the detection of King Ryence, so too we realize that they have escaped ours. For it is only here, at the very end of the retrospective account of the start of Britomart's quest, that we can see fully the truth behind the way in which they have presented themselves to the heroes of the previous books: only at this point do we know for certain that, in spite of her account of herself to Redcross, Britomart is not a trained knight; and only at this point can we gather that the "aged Squire" who accompanies her (III.i.4) is really her aged nurse in disguise. The poem's narrator, whom we already know to have been complicit, briefly, in Britomart's hiding of her identity from Guyon and Arthur (III.i.4-7), now turns out to have been complicit in a much more subtle and prolonged act of concealment as well. There are, in effect, two layers to Britomart's disguise. The first, consisting in the armour itself, cultivates the assumption that Guyon and Arthur make, and which we make briefly along with them, that she is a man. The second layer, maintained verbally when this first assumption breaks down, is that she is, although a woman, nonetheless a trained knight whose reason for being

abroad can be understood purely in chivalric terms; it is this second layer of the disguise which continues to delude Redcross, and which, to a large degree, continues to delude us as readers, until the end of the third canto.

As was the case at the end of Book One with respect to the Redcross knight himself (see Chapter One, pp. 198-9), the liberties that Britomart takes with the truth as she establishes her reputation in Faerie Land are silently approved of, and at times actively abetted, by The Faerie Queene's narrator. In Britomart's case, however, these liberties are considerably more prominent, and more pervasive of her legend: for whereas Redcross retells and revises his story only in the final canto of Book One, after his quest is completed, she begins the work of revising her story from the very outset, from the first occasion when she is called upon to give an account of herself (III.ii.6-9). Oddly, though, the promptness with which Britomart takes to reinventing herself does not make her seem, ultimately, a less honest character than Redcross. For whereas his revising of his story after the fact can have no effect upon the events themselves but only upon the way in which they will be reported, her accounts of her character and aims, however false at the time of their telling, have the opportunity to *become* true in the course of her quest -- and this is precisely what happens: lie as she may, she invariably

lives up to the account that she gives of herself, so that whatever may seem to be an outright falsehood proves, in the end, to have been merely an anticipation of some future truth. Thus, for example, even by the time that Britomart backs up her physical "disguize" as a "mayd Martiall" (III.iii.53) with a false account of a martial upbringing (III.ii.6), the disguise has already largely ceased to *be* a disguise: for while, in her encounters with Guyon (III.i.6) and with the mounted knights outside Malecasta's castle (III.i.28-9), she could be interpreted as an unpractised (if bold) maiden, whose victories are to be attributed entirely to her magical spear, the same excuse is not available for explaining away her impressive swordplay when she meets Malecasta's knights on foot (III.i.66); by this time, if not sooner, she has acquired the "skill" at arms required for her to be in fact the "mayd Martiall" which Glauce correctly supposed that "practize small" would make her (III.iii.53). So, too, when she pretends to Redcross that her quest for Arthegall is one of vengeance rather than of love (III.ii.8*ff*), this lie will turn out to be prophetic: for when she finally meets and recognizes her destined husband (IV.vi.26), it will be in the very literal kind of combat that she has unwittingly foretold (III.ii.16). Britomart shows a remarkable propensity, not only for establishing the reputation that she wants, but also for living up to the reputation that she

establishes. The narrator is helpfully partisan, not only in reconfirming Britomart's having achieved the goal that Glauce set for her of becoming a "mayd Martiall" by himself referring to her as a "martiall Mayd" (III.iv.18), but even in abetting her tendency to give reports of herself that are not yet true by doing something similar himself -- as when, at her first appearance in Faerie Land, he refers to her as "the famous *Britomart*" (III.i.8), a description that she *will* earn, but which she certainly has not earned as yet.

There is another respect, as well, in which Britomart's liberties with the truth tend to fall short of outright falsehood, namely that the words which she uses are often sufficiently ambiguous that a true interpretation of them is possible even though she intends that a false interpretation should be made. Thus, for example, when she describes her relationship with Arthegall in terms of enmity and violence, she is not merely lying to the Redcross knight, nor is she merely anticipating, unintentionally, something that will become literally true: she is, at the same time, making use of the conventional figurative representation of love as a war between the sexes.[7] Thus, the injury that she claims Arthegall has done to her (III.ii.8,12) can be interpreted as the "wound" which she has suffered from the "arrow" of love (III.ii.26), and her insistence that, when they meet, "one shall other slay, or daunt"

(III.ii.16) can be taken as a reference to the conventional theme of "maisterie" in love, which appears repeatedly in the course of her adventures (III.i.25, *etc.*). So she is not simply telling a lie, even if she intends that Redcross should assume (as he does) that her figurative expressions are meant literally. This kind of manipulation of the doubleness of meaning extends also to her use of her physical appearance in armour: at least in Book Three, it is not so much that she actively pretends to be a man as that she allows others to make the assumption that a person in armour *must* be male.

Such control over double meanings is a talent that Britomart must develop over the course of her quest. The assumption that she is a man on the part of those whom she meets serves her purpose straightforwardly enough in her encounter with Guyon and Arthur, but turns against her in Malecasta's castle, where her insistence on sticking to her disguise even when it is backfiring (III.i.52) gets her into a very awkward situation with her hostess. Britomart's trouble with Malecasta starts even before she enters the Castle Joyous, when, at the entrance, she is presented with a 'Catch-22', according to which, regardless of what she does, she must have a liaison with Malecasta: if she has "no Ladie, nor no loue", or if she fails to prove in combat that her love is fairer than the lady of the castle, then she must

grant herself to Malecasta; but if she should be victorious in combat, she must claim Malecasta's love as her reward (III.i.26-7). Britomart tries to take control of the situation by playing on her challengers' ignorance of her sex in such as way as to imply that her case cannot be fit into the categories offered:

> Loue haue I sure, (quoth she) but Lady none;
> Yet will I not fro mine owne loue remoue,
> Ne to your Lady will I seruice done...
> (III.i.28).

But in spite of this gesture of defiance, and her success in the combat which it provokes, she does not escape, after all, from the paradox of the offered terms; for her victory merely results in her opponents' beseeching her "To enter in" and claim the stipulated "reward" of Malecasta's love (III.i.30) -- a request to which "She graunted", apparently not realizing that, in doing so, she is submitting herself to the very thing to which the law of the castle has committed her from the beginning, and which she has attempted to resist, namely an amorous encounter with their mistress. Her quibble over the distinction, in her case, between "a Ladie" and "a Loue", in the end gains her nothing, just as her persistence in disguising herself, once inside the castle, fails to protect her from Malecasta's amorous attentions (III.i.42*ff*).

Britomart's difficulties at the Castle Joyous prompt

her into an important sophistication of her self-presentation: for it is at this point, faced with having been seen without her armour, and with the Redcross Knight's consequent interest in knowing "what inquest/ Made her dissemble her disguised kind" (III.ii.4), that she manages to contrive her verbal substitute for the physical disguise that has momentarily failed. Rather than revealing that her taking up of arms is a recent expedient, she claims

> ...that from the howre
> I taken was from nourses tender pap,
> I haue beene trained vp in warlike stowre,
> To tossen speare and shield, and to affrap
> The warlike ryder to his most mishap...
>
> (III.ii.6),

or in other words, that she has always been the "mayd Martiall" which in fact recent "practize" has been making her (III.iii.53). The Redcross knight is satisfied with this explanation; and Britomart herself does not forget the lesson that it is possible to obtain respect for herself as a woman without foregoing the respect that she has won as a knight. In her next meeting with knights of Faery Court (in this case, with Satyrane and Paridell), having established her martial credentials, she does not shy from revealing her womanhood, and in so doing, she redoubles her good report with them (III.ix.21*ff*). By this point, the Redcross knight's opinion of her --"Faire Lady she him seemd, like Lady drest,/ But fairest knight

aliue, when armed was her brest" (III.ii.4) -- is becoming a general chorus: "euery one her likte, and euery one her loued" (III.ix.24).

As her adventures continue, Britomart herself appears to be increasingly in control of her own reputation, using both the presumption that she is male and the revelation that she is female to her own best advantage. This control goes on increasing throughout Book Three, and will culminate in the trick that she plays in the first canto of Book Four, wherein she uses, successively, both her male and female personae, in order to claim, simultaneously, both a woman and a man for her paramours, and so to gain entry for them both to a castle whose custom is to refuse admission to anyone unaccompanied by a "loue" (IV.i.9-15). The contrast between this episode and that at Malecasta's castle one book earlier is telling: in every detail, from the terms on which she fulfils the custom and enters the castle (III.i.26*ff*, IV.i.9*ff*) to the terms on which she shares a bed with another woman (III.i.61, IV.i.15), Britomart now controls exactly the kinds of action which previously had swept her along, all on the basis of her increased control over the point at which the line is crossed between one interpretation of her ambiguous appearance and another.

To Britomart's increasing control over the crossing of the figurative line that separates one interpretation of her words and actions from another, there corresponds

an increasing control over the terms on which she herself crosses such literal boundaries as the walls of castles. Thus, after her faltering management of her entrance into Malecasta's castle, she is increasingly successful at the entrances to the castles of Malbecco (III.ix.18) and Busyrane (III.xi.25), and finally at the entrance to the castle that she visits with Amoret in the first canto of Book Four. Indeed, as we have seen in the contrasting examples offered by the first cantos respectively of Books Three and Four, the degree of her control over the crossing of a particular literal boundary regularly depends upon the degree of control that she can exercise over her crossing of the figurative ones.

Britomart is by no means alone in Book Three in crossing the lines that ordinarily keep opposites such as knight and lady, war and love, distinct from one another. On the contrary, as we shall see, the world in which the action of the Legend of Chastity takes place is rife with people, things, and events of ambiguous significance, all liable to be interpreted in one way at one moment, and in quite another way a short time later; the chief basis for this ambiguity is Spenser's dual use of warfare (and that other domain of arms, hunting) on one hand as the figurative *representative* of love, on the other as the literal *opposite* of love. But unlike Britomart, most of the characters who figure significantly in the action of Book Three do not learn to control the interpretation of

the events in which they are involved in such a way as to determine, to their own advantage, the points at which the semantic lines are crossed. On the contrary, a number of characters confront the semantic ambiguity of their world by trying to secure and make inviolable precisely the kinds of boundaries which Britomart intentionally transgresses. But this strategy, unlike Britomart's, is largely ineffective: for just as, in Book Three, characters such as Malbecco and Busyrane erect physical barriers only to see them breached, so a number of other characters attempt to create absolute distinctions on the order of meaning, only to see them transgressed to their own disadvantage or discomfiture.

One character who particularly invites comparison with the Briton Princess Britomart is, of course, the Briton Prince Arthur. Like Britomart, Arthur has undertaken his quest out of love, and seeks a spouse in Faery Land whom he knows only through image and report; as in her case, his falling in love is described as the result of a sneak attack by a conventional personalized Love with his bow and arrows, an attack which reduced him, at one blow, from "libertie" to complete subjection (I.ix.12), and took from him all power to control the course of his own life (I.ix.7).

Prior to his falling in love, Arthur had the kind of chivalric upbringing to which Britomart can only pretend (I.ix.3*ff*). Central to this upbringing, as he describes

it, was an ethical training, based on a loosely Platonic psychology according to which reason must exercise sovereignty and "subdew" the "creeping flames" of the passions, amongst which "loue" is ranked (I.ix.9). The passions, although conceived of as "kindly", or intrinsic to the human makeup (I.ix.9), are pictured as being in open war against the governing faculty, as armies besieging a "fort...//...with battrie long" (I.ix.11). This psychology is very similar to, if not identical with, the one propounded in Book Two by Guyon's Palmer, according to which the "affections" -- which include the "monster fell" called "loue" -- will, if given the opportunity, make "Strong warres... and cruell battry bend/ Gainst fort of Reason, it to ouerthrow" (II.iv.34-5). For knights such as Arthur and Guyon who have been "vpbrought" in such "vertuous lore" (I.ix.3-4), the task of remaining morally "vpright" (II.i.6) is conceived of entirely as a matter of defending the figurative "fort" of the well-ordered rational self against the insurrection of the passions, and particularly of love.[8] So long as they are governed by such a chivalric ethic, the figurative task of personal morality is precisely congruent with the literal task of defending the order of society against uprisings and invasions -- so much so, that the two can become one, as in the defense of the symbolic castle of Alma. Both are battles which one fights to win: for to lose would be,

quite simply, to be subjected to the forces of evil, to one's unending grief and shame, if not literally to one's destruction.

With the victory of love, all this must come radically into question, as a kind of subjection is discovered which, if it still brings grief, need bring neither shame nor literal destruction. What has been taken for granted up to this point, that love is an inferior drive relative to the rational faculty from which it threatens to usurp the will, is now contested by love's claim to being a superior force which exceeds "reasons reach" (III.ii.36). Under the governorship of love, rational distinctions can be (and regularly are) violated -- so that, for example, in the logic of love, one's enemy does not necessarily mean one harm, nor is being defeated by and subjected to such an enemy necessarily shameful or bad for oneself; thus, for example, Una and Redcross see Arthur's bondage to love not as a compromise to his chivalric "prowess" but as its worthy complement (I.ix.16-17).[9] For Arthur, once love has won the internal 'battle', the congruency breaks down between the significance of the martial metaphors which describe his internal state and that of the literal martial engagements which make up his chivalric career, with respect to which the old, 'rational' rules still apply.

Since Arthur has already fallen in love by the time

he appears in the first book of the poem, there are, already, two very different sets of rules in operation for (on one hand) the literal battles in which he engages against the likes of Orgoglio, Pyrochles and Cymochles, and Maleger, and (on the other hand) for the figurative, internal battle in which he has been wounded and conquered by love. But, at least in Books One and Two, this situation does not become confusing, either for the reader or for Arthur himself, because his erotically-motivated quest is kept strictly in the background -- it is what we learn about from his reports of himself, and what we understand him to be engaged in when he is not taking part in the action that is reported to us directly (I.ix.7-20, II.ix.5-7) -- while his participation in the foreground action, as for example to rescue Redcross or Guyon, always constitutes an adventure distinct from this background quest, motivated not by the paradoxical logic of love but by the straightforward chivalric logic of his upbringing, which disdains subjection and strives always for victory.

All this changes, however, in the first canto of Book Three. With the knights' entry into the forest, and the sudden appearance, there, of Florimell (III.i.14-15), the foregrounded chivalric action itself suddenly enters the realm of the erotic, and at once the neat distinctions break down which Arthur, to this point, has successfully maintained between action and report, the martial and the

venerean, the literal and the figurative. We may see this most clearly by comparing his encounter with Florimell to his encounter with Una two books earlier.

The situations of the two women, at the point when he meets them, are similar in a number of respects: both are noble and beautiful ladies riding unarmed and unprotected in search of their beloved knights who, they have heard, have suffered grievous defeats, if not death, in battle (I.vii.26-8; III.v.8-10). But Arthur's response to each is very different. Although Una is, like Florimell, an exceptionally beautiful woman, who is liable unintentionally to arouse male passions -- we might compare, for example, Sans Loy's "lawlesse lust" for her (I.vi.Arg.) to the "beastly lust" with which the foster pursues Florimell (III.i.17) -- Arthur relates to Una purely in a chivalric capacity, without erotic intentions toward her. (We may note, for example, that he does *not* respond at the level of the *double-entendre* to Una's innocent question, "What hath poore Virgin.../ Wherewith you to reward?" or to her offer of her "simple selfe" to her rescuer (I.viii.27).) There is no confusion between the adventure which Arthur undertakes on Una's behalf and the quest for Gloriana which he interrupts in order to undertake it; the only connection between the two engagements is that, in helping Una, he may contribute to his reputation as a knight and so to his eventually being deemed worthy of Gloriana's hand.

In contrast, Arthur's pursuit of Florimell becomes deeply confused with his quest for Gloriana. He himself conflates Florimell with Gloriana in his mind, wishing that

> ...that Lady faire mote bee
> His Faery Queene, for whom he did complaine:
> Or that his Faery Queene were such, as shee...
>
> (III.iv.54);

and this conflation extends to his hoping to win Florimell's love (III.i.18, III.iv.46-7), and to his pining for her when she is absent (III.v.7), just as if she actually were his beloved. What is more, to the close association of the two women in Arthur's mind there corresponds a close resemblance between his immediate, literal situation with respect to Florimell and his more general, figurative situation with respect to Gloriana: just as he has, quite literally, "pursewd" Florimell through the woods (III.i.18), so, figuratively, throughout his quest, he has been engaged in the "poursuit" of the Faery Queen (III.v.2). The narrator reinforces our sense of this resemblance by embellishing the description of Arthur's progress in his literal attempt to catch Florimell with similes which conventionally are used for describing the progress of a lover in his figurative attempt to catch his beloved: he pursues her as a hunter his quarry (III.iv.46)[10], and loses sight of her like a ship's pilot losing sight of

the star that guides him (III.iv.53).[11] In the end, unlike the recollection of his love for Gloriana in Book One, which encourages him to part from Una "With fresh desire his voyage to pursew" (I.ix.18), Arthur's thoughts of Gloriana in Book Three, although they call him back "to his first poursuit" (III.v.2), fail in doing so to call him away from his pursuit of Florimell. Rather, just as his quest for the Faery Queen has become conflated with the adventure that distracted him from it, so his attempt to get out of the forest in order to resume his quest (III.v.3) becomes entangled in a renewed attempt to locate Florimell (III.v.11-12). It is in this state of confused intentions that he wanders out of the action of Book Three.

The source of Arthur's difficulties in his encounter with Florimell is that a congruency is re-established there, which has not existed since he fell in love, between the literal actions in which he engages and the figurative actions by means of which he represents his inner experience. As a result, the distinctions between the literal and the figurative, between the outer and the inner, and between his quest for Gloriana and the adventures which interrupt it, all of which remained intact throughout his involvement in Books One and Two, suddenly become unclear, leaving the Prince with a kind of semantic double vision. In this state, he wanders "to and fro at disauenture" (III.iv.53), unwittingly courting

accusations of infidelity, and worse: for in failing to distinguish between the hunt as a figurative representation of wooing and the literal chasing of a helpless woman through the forest, he becomes, in his chivalric actions, scarcely distinguishable from the "wicked foster" whom he succeeds as the prime reason for Florimell's continued flight (III.iv.47*ff*). "To reskew her" from the "foule foster" (III.i.18) was a laudable enough goal -- precisely the kind of thing, in fact, that might have further advanced his reputation, and thereby brought him another step closer to winning Gloriana's love -- if only, in setting off on the adventure, he had been able clearly to distinguish the Faery Queen from Florimell as the object of his "hope to win thereby/... the fairest Dame aliue" (III.i.18). As things are, however, Florimell seems fully justified in continuing to flee from so confused a knight, however well-intentioned he may be (III.iv.50).

To his credit, Arthur seems at least dimly to sense that the lack of clear vision, brought about by the encroachment of night, which forces him to give up the pursuit of Florimell "when her wayes he could no more descry" (III.iv.53), has itself a figurative analogy -- the lack of mental acuity that I have called his semantic double vision. For he blames the night not only for taking from him the "goodly scope" of Florimell (III.iv.52), but also for the paradoxical "visions" which

visit "an heauy hart" like his own instead of sleep, in which even complete opposites like life and death can be confused (III.iv.57). Amongst the confused visions that trouble his own sleepless mind are those thoughts in which Florimell and Gloriana are consciously conflated (III.iv.54) -- a conflation which seems the likely antecedent for his double-pronged vilification of Night as a "Breeder of new, renewer of old smarts" (III.iv.57). What Arthur fails to see, however, is that the loss of his mental acuity came on long before the physical encroachment of darkness, and that the effect of nightfall was merely to bring about, literally, what had been true figuratively from the moment when he undertook the pursuit of Florimell. For just as, with the coming of night, he lost sight of the woman whom he was pursuing and "to and fro at disauenture strayd", so his pursuit of Florimell was, from the beginning, a "disauenture" in which he "strayd" from his quest for Gloriana for lack of a clear mental picture of which woman he was meant to be pursuing. And just as, when he laid himself down to pass the hours of darkness, a "thousand fancies" in which he conflated Florimell and Gloriana "bet his idle braine" (III.iv.54), so, from the moment when he conceived the intention of winning Florimell for himself, he confused Florimell with Gloriana as the proper object of his "suit" (III.iv.52). However Arthur may blame the night for his troubles, then, its real effect has been merely

to complete the analogy between his literal external situation and his already figuratively benighted internal state.

In casting Night as the source of all visual and semantic unclarity, and praying for its defeat at the hands of Day, which "sheweth each thing, as it is indeed" (III.iv.59-60), Arthur is trying to redraw the lines which distinguished good from evil, truth from duplicity, in the straightforward martial engagements which made up the chivalric action in which he was involved in previous books. The personalized Night whom he deprecates is recognizably the chthonic patron of evil whom Duessa visits in the fifth canto of Book One: an intractable deity who, although she has already been vanquished by the Olympian gods and is doomed to see her own children defeated by "The sonnes of Day", nevertheless, to the extent of her powers, contrives to work evil and falsehood in the world (compare I.v.20-6, III.iv.55-9). Arthur himself, as he appeared in that book, armed with a sunlike shield that could confound with its beams "all that was not such, as seemd in sight" (I.vii.34-5), was himself clearly among the superior forces of Day, able to "chase away... too long lingring night" (III.iv.60) and all the ambiguity associated with it. But things have become more complicated since then: as love has entered chivalric action, so the distinction between friend and foe has become less clear. Even after the foster rushes

off in a different direction, Arthur thinks of his pursuit of Florimell as an attempt "to reskew" her (III.iv.46-7), and he denounces night, who foils this "reskew", as belonging among "the damned spirits" who live in "hell" (III.iv.60); but from Florimell's perspective, it is Arthur himself, in pursuing her, who is like a "feend of hell" (III.iv.47), while night, in causing him to lose her trail, is in effect her rescuer. And if night provides the occasion for the troubling visions in which Arthur conflates his desire for Florimell with his love for Gloriana (III.iv.54), then it has provided, equally, the occasion for the dream (if it was a dream) which led to his falling in love with Gloriana in the first place (I.ix.13-14) -- making his insistence, at this point in the poem, on the clear moral scheme which associates Night solely with evil and Day solely with good, virtual heresy against his love for the Faery Queen. Nor will the return of day, for which Arthur so fervently prays, restore semantic clarity to his world as he seems to hope: on the contrary, with the coming of dawn, he will continue to lament his having failed to catch Florimell with all the passion that he might more duly express as an unrequited lover of the Faery Queen (III.v.7), and soon let his faltering attempt to return to his search for Gloriana be diverted into the taking up of a search for Florimell. Indeed, the association of clarity of meaning with the benevolence of

the bright heavenly powers, and of ambiguity and duplicity solely with the malign chthonic forces, has already been disrupted, in Book Three, by the narrator's assertion that "eternall fate" -- which is regularly identified in this book with the will of heaven (III.iii.24,*etc.*) -- works its "vnknowen purpose" through "subtle sophismes" and "double senses" (III.iv.28). Even the language with which Arthur attempts to state the subordinate role in the cosmos of Night and her children is beset by ambiguity: for when he prophecies that

> Dayes dearest children be the blessed seed,
> Which darknesse shall subdew, and heauen win...
>
> (III.iv.59),

the forces of "darknesse" threaten to supplant "Dayes dearest children" as the subject of his sentence. In all these respects, Arthur's belated attempt to redraw the familiar lines that once divided good from evil, clarity from ambiguity, and light from darkness, and which narrowly circumscribed the latter camp within a subordinate position in the world, cannot succeed now that the external field of martial action has followed the internal battlefield of his soul in giving way to the darkened woods of venerean intrigue.

The kinds of semantic lines that Arthur straddles unintentionally, in his adventures in the Legend of Chastity, are precisely those which Britomart is in the

process of learning to cross deliberately. Whereas he loses the ability that he showed in his earlier adventures to keep distinct the martial and the erotic domains of experience, and their use, literal and figurative respectively, of the concepts and imagery of violence, she gains an increasing control over the points at which these distinctions are broken down. He suffers from a collapse in the distinction, which had existed throughout his involvement in the first two books of the poem, between his respective roles as a knight and a lover; she profits by intentionally conflating these two roles in her own person. He finds himself pursuing a second love more or less by mistake, and fails to control or even to become fully aware of the implications of having done so; in contrast, she learns, by the first canto of Book Four, to lay claim, deliberately, to two loves at once, while exercising full and conscious control over the terms on which she does so.

Two other episodes in the Legend of Chastity which are, in a sense, complementary to Arthur's unhappy experience in pursuing Florimell are those in which Cymoent and Belphoebe attempt, respectively, to prepare for the wounding of Marinell and to respond to the wounding of Timias. Whereas Arthur's difficulties in Book Three stem from his conflation of two essentially distinct situations -- on one hand, his attempt to gain Gloriana's favour, which is figuratively referred to as a

"poursuit", and on the other, his quite literal pursuit of Florimell -- Cymoent and Belphoebe run into difficulties for the opposite reason that they try to render unambiguous words or situations in which, in fact, literal and figurative meanings are inextricably conflated.

Cymoent wrongly assumes that the prophecy of Proteus, that "A virgin strange and stout... should dismay, or kill" Marinell (III.iv.25), has only one meaning, namely the conventional figurative one which the ladies whom Marinell spurns invoke when they "complaine,/ That they for loue of him would algates dy" (III.iv.26).[12] In fact, the prophecy *does* have this meaning, as will eventually be revealed when Marinell falls in love with Florimell (IV.xii.27-28); but it *also* has the entirely literal meaning which is fulfilled "Through heauy stroke of *Britomartis* hond" (III.iv.28-9). Cymoent fails to give Marinell adequate advice, not because she gets the sense of the prophecy wrong[13], but because she acknowledges only one of the "double senses" (III.iv.28) that it contains. Because "she of womans force did feare no harme" (III.iv.27), she ignores the possibility that the "deadly wound" which will strike Marinell down might be a literal one.

Belphoebe, attempting to restore Timias to health after his relapse into critical illness, ignores the opposite possibility: that the wound from which he is

suffering might be the conventional, *figurative* wound of love (III.v.48-50).[14] The reason that she is able to make this mistake is that the illness which results from this wound is not *merely* figurative, even if the "dart" that caused it (III.v.42) apparently was: on the contrary, while his being mortally ill clearly does have the conventional figurative meaning that he is suffering grievous emotional distress as a result of his unrequited love (III.v.43*ff*), it *also* is sufficiently a literal condition that Belphoebe can confuse his symptoms with those that would have appeared had the closed-over wound in his thigh become infected (III.v.49). The fact that this illness will not respond to the "Restoratiues.../ And costly Cordialles" (III.v.50) which are ordinarily effectual in treating such symptoms does not make the condition any less literally real; rather, it indicates that the literal illness is a *symbol*, whose figurative meaning determines the success or failure of any attempt to cure it. Just as Guyon found it impossible to deal effectively with the symbolic characters Occasion and Furor so long as he engaged only with their literal meanings (Chapter Two, pp.245-6), so Belphoebe wastes all her care so long as she engages only with the literal facts of Timias' sickness.

The literal reality of the effects that Timias suffers from the 'arrow-wound' in his heart distinguishes his affliction from the one from which Arthur reports

himself to be suffering in Book One. Although Arthur describes himself as afflicted with a "fresh bleeding wound, which day and night/ Whilome doth rancle in my riuen brest" (I.ix.7), a reader is unlikely to wonder why the earlier detailed description of the prince (I.vii.29-36) failed to mention his horrible injury, or why it has not left him bedridden; for this love-injury, unlike Timias's, follows convention in describing only figuratively the experience of the lover.[15] Like his love-quest itself, Arthur's love-sickness is kept strictly in the background in the first book of the poem: it is something that he reports to the other characters, not something that impinges on the action. But as, in Book Three, Arthur's love quest emerges from the background of report to become confused with the foregrounded chivalric action, so, at the same time, the conventionally wounded heart of the lover ceases (at least in Timias' case) to be something that he merely talks about, becoming instead something whose full-blown physical effects he literally suffers, and which consequently overtakes his very capacity for chivalric action.[16]

Because it is the conventional figurative meaning of Timias' symbolic illness which governs the results of all attempts to treat it, the only treatment which is capable of curing him is itself the conventional one: namely, Belphoebe's granting to him her love in return, and

surrendering to him her "chastity and vertue virginall" (III.v.53).[17] This cure -- that is, her love, or her virginity, depending on where one wants to place the emphasis -- following the tradition which springs from the thirteenth-century Romance of the Rose, is described figuratively as her "dainty Rose" (III.v.51).[18] The narrator makes the figurative significance of "this flowre" clear once he attributes it to the "bounteous race/ Of woman" generally, by describing it as growing "in stocke of earthly flesh" and "In gentle Ladies brest" (III.v.52) -- a context which more or less demands the flower's non-literal interpretation. But insofar as the description of the flower is particular to Belphoebe, the "dainty Rose", like the illness which it is capable of curing, is given an unusually literal existence alongside what it figuratively represents. The description of her careful protection of the rose against inclement weather (III.v.51), while of course it suggests her equally careful guarding of her chastity, also confirms that the flower is something which has a literal existence for her: it is, literally, one of her medicinal herbs, albeit it differs from all the others in also being a *symbol* of something else.[19]

It is clear enough, I think, that one reason why Belphoebe fails to cure Timias is that she will not contemplate granting to him what her rose figuratively represents; what perhaps needs more emphasis is another

reason, namely that she will not contemplate the quite literal act of making a "Cordiall" of her favourite flower (III.v.50). Of course, the one act represents the other; but this fact does not diminish the significance, for Belphoebe, of the literal flower which (as it happens) symbolizes her chastity. Her unwillingness to pluck a rose for which she has cared as for a "daughter" (III.v.51), even for the sake of saving another human being, itself contributes to our sense of her character as one who prefers nature and the fruits of her own endeavors to human company; it even, I think, lends a certain unexpected pathos to the scene. More importantly, locating the doubleness of the flower's meaning inside the world experienced by the characters allows us to observe Belphoebe's relationship to this doubleness itself. Her unwillingness to resort to a medicine which symbolizes something else may be nearly as significant for our understanding of the episode as what precisely that medicine symbolizes. Just as she insists on interpreting Timias's symptoms purely in their literal sense, as the effects of a festering wound, so she insists on responding to them with medicines which themselves have only literal meanings. Her refusal to treat him with her rose is not only a refusal to surrender her virginity to him: it is also a part of her refusal to have to do with the semantic doubleness of the situation in which she has found herself involved. In

her dealings with Timias, Belphoebe ensures that she keeps her virginity intact principally by keeping her literal-mindedness intact.[20]

In that Belphoebe retains her virginity, this strategy of hers is a successful one; but in another sense, her refusal to acknowledge the symbolic dimension of the situation blocks any possibility of progress toward a mutual understanding with the afflicted squire. Meanwhile, Timias himself, it should be said, does not contribute toward a resolution of the problem, and for a related reason. He insists on seeing his own love for Belphoebe in terms of the martial ethic which characterized the training of Arthur and Guyon -- the ethic according to which love is a base "passion" which "reason" must "subdew" (III.v.44) -- rather than acknowledging, as Arthur has done, that the victory of love in one's soul requires a suspension of the martial logic which says that defeat and subjection are always shameful. Like Belphoebe, although in a different way, Timias persists in interpreting his wound according to a martial logic which is inadequate to the semantics of love.

To this point, I have concentrated on the extent to which Cymoent's and Belphoebe's troubles are the opposites of Arthur's. Ultimately, however, all these characters have something in common. Whether the semantic ambiguity of their experience arises through

their conflating of two essentially distinct things (as in Arthur's case) or, conversely, through their encountering some one thing whose meaning is irreducibly double (as happens, in different ways, to Cymoent and Belphoebe), they all respond to this ambiguity in the same way: by insisting on the boundary between the literal and the figurative which in fact has already broken down.

So much, for the moment, for the relationship of the characters in the Legend of Chastity to the distinction (or the lack thereof) between the literal and figurative meanings of imagery conventionally associated with love. Another of the semantic lines which, as we have seen, Arthur tries belatedly and unsuccessfully to redraw, in his attempt to extricate himself from his unhappy experience in Book Three, is that which had previously distinguished good from evil: the Olympian forces of daylight and clarity from the chthonic powers of darkness and confusion. In this respect, too, Arthur's experience is complemented by that of other characters in the third book.

As I have already suggested (see Introduction (2), pp. 91-3), the character from whose perspective the apparent breakdown in the distinction between good and evil appears most forcefully is Florimell, for whom the difference between would-be rescuer and would-be rapist effectively collapses. Every one of the would-be

rescuers of Florimell who actually encounters either her or her simulacrum in the action of the third book -- including Prince Arthur -- reveals his intention to claim her for himself as the reward for his pains, and so becomes in turn the threat to her from which he had 'saved' her but a moment before. In view of this continually repeated experience, the revelation of the fact that "after her are gone/ All the braue knights, that doen in armes excell" seems calculated (and this in spite of assurances that their intention is "To sauegard her" from harm) not so much to inspire our hope that she might yet be rescued, as positively to multiply the number of quarters from which we feel her to be threatened (III.viii.46). If we do sense a threat to her in the fact "That all the noble knights of *Maydenhead,/* Which her ador'd" (III.viii.47) -- all of whose suits of love, we might remember, she has disdained (III.v.8) -- have set out in the hope of becoming her rescuer, then it may seem less surprising to us that Paridell, who announces the search and who counts himself among those "knights of *Maydenhead*" who have undertaken it, should turn out, in spite of his gallant words, not to be a preserver of maidenheads but a habitual predator upon them (see for example III.x.35).

Florimell is victimized not only by the ambiguity that besets the motives even of her best-intentioned pursuers, but also by an ambiguity from which, despite

her chaste intentions, she cannot seem to free her own words and actions. The most striking example of this is the unintentional string of *double-entendres* with which she addresses the old fisherman who subsequently tries to rape her (III.viii.24)[21]; but it becomes clear as well, from the juxtaposition of her misadventures with the story of the False Florimell, that even the fear which she shows of being violated, and her resistance to her would-be violators, can be construed by them, perversely, as an enticement to their pursuit -- for it is precisely these aspects of Florimell's behaviour which her demon simulacrum most closely imitates, in order to be as enticing as possible to the succession of men who lay claim to the image. Thus, for example, when the witch's son takes 'her' in his arms, "she.../ Coyly rebutted his embracement light", knowing that by keeping herself unavailable she will be able continuously "to hold a foole in vaine delight" (III.viii.10); and when she falls into Braggadochio's possession, she likewise responds unfavorably to his lustful advances,

> As seeming sory, that she euer came
> Into his powre, that vsed her so hard,
> To reaue her honor, which she more then life prefard.
>
> (III.viii.14).

As the Squire of Dames observes in his misogynist tale, there can be other reasons for a woman to put on the appearance of chastity than her having a chaste heart

(III.vii.58-60); what he and the False Florimell both know is that the appearance of chastity can contribute significantly to making a woman attractive to men, for each would like to feel that his 'prize' is not lightly won, nor likely to be lightly lost again to another. The unpleasant corollary of this, for a woman like Florimell who is genuinely chaste, is that she finds that it is precisely her fleeing from her pursuers and resisting their advances which is interpreted as a sign of her desirability and which therefore, paradoxically, encourages their pursuit.[22]

A number of the characters who, in pursuing Florimell, see themselves as benignly attempting to win her affections, seek unsuccessfully to persuade her that their intentions differ from those of her more brutish pursuers, and in this respect to reestablish the distinction between good and evil which she does not recognize in their behaviour. But as her story progresses, such attempts to win her trust are more and more openly revealed to be unreliable, apparently vindicating the disbelief with which, from the beginning, she has greeted them.

The first such attempt to distinguish good intentions from bad is Arthur's. Riding after her in hot pursuit,

> Aloud to her he oftentimes did call,
> To doe away vaine doubt, and needlesse dreed:

> Full myld to her he spake, and oft let fall
> Many meeke wordes, to stay and comfort her withall.
>
> (III.iv.48).

But Florimell, although she is aware "that it was a knight, which now her sewd", refuses to distinguish between the meaning of his pursuit and that of the base foster's: "she no lesse the knight feard, then that villein rude" (III.iv.50).

In her next encounter, with the witch and her son, the situation is in many respects reversed: rather than a noble character who chases her through the forest like a "villein rude", Florimell is confronted with a base villain who manages to woo her with gentleness and courtesy (III.vii.16-7). Once again, Florimell is unconvinced, and plans

> In secret wize her selfe thence to withdraw,
> For feare of mischiefe, which she did forecast
> Might be by the witch or that her sonne compast...
>
> (III.vii.18).

This time, her suspicion is fully supported by the narrator, who declares that the witch's son, however he may suppose himself "to loue her", in fact is capable of nothing "but brutish lust" (III.vii.15-6). It appears that merely to suppose that one's intentions are noble and to represent them as such does not guarantee that they are so in fact -- a judgement which might be supposed to reflect badly on Arthur, in the evidently confused state

of mind in which he pursues Florimell.

The last of the characters who attempts to persuade Florimell of his good intentions toward her is Proteus:

> ...he endeuoured with speeches milde
> Her to recomfort, and accourage bold,
> Bidding her feare no more her foeman vilde,
> Nor doubt himselfe...
>
> (III.viii.34).

Both the situation -- his having rescued her from immediate danger at the hands of a base lecher -- and the concern that he expresses to distinguish his intentions from those of the villain from whose clutches he has delivered her, are reminiscent of her earlier encounter with Arthur. Once again, Florimell is unpersuaded; and soon it becomes clear that her suspicion is justified. Proteus's initially fatherly attentions (III.viii.35) soon give way to a wooing, by means of gifts and gentle entertainment, which is strongly reminiscent of the persuasions attempted by the witch's son (III.viii.37); and when this fails, he presently resorts to "sharpe threates" (III.viii.40) and finally to casting her into "a Dongeon deepe.../ ...to make her his eternall thrall" (III.viii.41). Within the space of a few stanzas, Proteus (as befits his changeable nature) has run through the whole range of male behaviour which Florimell has experienced in her flight, revealing clearly what she has always suspected, namely, just how tenuous is the distinction which her would-be rescuers have tried to

draw between themselves and the would-be predators upon her chastity.

Proteus's descent from reassurance through courteous wooing into bullying and finally imprisoning Florimell is followed almost immediately by an episode which further emphasizes the potential for fair words and gentle behaviour to be mere veils for more vicious intentions. Paridell and Satyrane, who have only just presented themselves as among the would-be defenders of Florimell's chastity, debate what to do about the fact that Malbecco admits no guests to his castle for fear that they will deprive him of his money or his wife. Paridell demands to know why they should not immediately "ransack all, and him selfe kill" (III.ix.8); Satyrane, while apparently agreeing with the sentiment, suggests a more subtle strategy, which Paridell promptly adopts:

> Nay let vs first (said *Satyrane*) entreat
> The man by gentle meanes, to let vs in,
> And afterwardes affray with cruell threat,
> Ere that we to efforce it do begin:
> Then if all fayle, we will by force it win,
> And eke reward the wretch for his mesprise...
>
> (III.ix.9).

It becomes clear that, for these knights, to "entreat/... by gentle meanes" is no more than a technique for getting what they want, one which they know they can always abandon in favour of the violent coercion which they have already declared themselves to be ready to practise. For

them, the passage from mild entreaty to open force is not only quick, as it was for Proteus; it is also cynically premeditated.

Paridell further confirms his cynical attitude toward courteous persuasion by the way in which he pursues his next objective, the seducing of Hellenore (III.x.7-9). Indeed, the narrator strongly associates the hypocritical parade of courtly love conventions by means of which Paridell pursues Malbecco's wife with the prior display of hypocrisy by means of which he sought entry to Malbecco's castle, by describing the seduction according to the convention which figuratively represents the woman herself as a castle to be besieged (III.x.10). Paridell, like Proteus before him, shows that he knows well the arts of the "fawning... flatterer" (III.viii.38) from which Florimell retreats in well-warranted mistrust. But, as it happens, Hellenore is no Florimell. Far from withdrawing from Paridell's attempt to victimize her, she actually embraces it as an opportunity to pursue her own advantage, so that, in the end, where Florimell is cast into prison by the lecher whose advances she refuses, Hellenore sets herself free from a domestic imprisonment by means of the lecher whose advances she encourages. The reason that Hellenore is able to do this is that she herself fully controls the semantics of her situation, in a way that Florimell never does. In the first place, she shows that she is as capable as Paridell of recommending

herself through a disingenuous show of courtesy:

> She came in presence with right comely grace,
> And fairely them saluted, as became,
> And shewd her selfe in all a gentle curteous Dame.
>
> (III.ix.26).

Second, she clearly understands well the Ovidian irony with which Paridell deploys the courtly love conventions, and is able to respond in kind (III.ix.28).[23] Finally, she herself actively controls and utilizes the ambiguous relationship between rape and rescue, which Florimell recognizes but to which she relates only as its victim. Thus, the tenth canto's argument, which declares that "Paridell rapeth Hellenore", turns out, in the event, to refer not to her unwilling abduction, as the words suggest, but rather to her assisted escape, which she herself disguises as an abduction by calling out to Malbecco, as she goes,

> ...for helpe, ere helpe were past;
> For loe that Guest would beare her forcibly,
> And meant to rauish her, that rather had to dy.
>
> (III.x.13).

Paridell himself, in what constitutes yet another disconcerting shift of moral perspective for the reader, emerges at the end of this episode as at least a relatively sympathetic figure next to the cuckolded Malbecco whom he has persistently abused; for Paridell,

at least, has the virtue, which Malbecco (along with virtually every other male character in Book Three) notably has not, of not being possessive of the woman whom he makes the object of his attentions, and of acknowledging, in fact, that she has a will of her own (III.x.35-38).

Through these dizzying changes in the apparent moral status of characters -- Proteus transforming himself from rescuer to persecutor, and Paridell from would-be rescuer to persecutor and finally to rescuer again -- the narrator is not so much a helpful guide as a habitual source of misguidance, in that his chief occupation in these cantos seems to be to insist upon precisely the kind of moral absolutes which will be demolished in the action. Like Arthur after his failure to catch Florimell, the narrator insists on the old, black and white morality within a world that the dynamics of *eros* have rendered morally far more complex. Thus, for example, the straightforwardly moralistic tone which marks his introductory description of Hellenore as a "wanton Lady" (III.ix.1) fails entirely to anticipate the extent to which her decision to cuckold her husband (III.x.11) will seem, in its context, to be an understandable, even a justifiable response to a marriage which amounts to little better than solitary confinement; while his subsequent treatment of her as just another of the women with "weake harts" who have passively fallen

victim to Paridell's Ovidian wiliness (III.x.9-11) entirely misses -- as did the argument to the canto, with its naive declaration that "Paridell rapeth Hellenore" (III.x.Arg.) -- the intelligence and ironic distance with which Hellenore assumes the conventional role of passivity in order to engineer her escape from Malbecco. More strikingly still, in hailing Proteus's arrival on the scene in the eighth canto as an example of "how the heauens of voluntary grace" send "succour" to the virtuous in the hour of their greatest need (III.viii.29), the narrator not only fails to anticipate or to account for a significant part of the highly ambivalent role that Proteus will play in Florimell's story, but actually cultivates, in the reader, the very interpretation of Proteus's appearance which Proteus himself tries in vain (III.viii.34) to cultivate in Florimell: namely, that he is the answer to her prayers (III.viii.27), and that here, at last, is a return to the straightforwardly benevolent kind of rescue -- unsullied by selfish interests or ulterior motives, and entirely distinct, therefore, from the evil that necessitates the rescue in the first place -- which marked the intervention of divine grace in the eighth cantos of the previous books (compare, especially, the language of I.viii.1, II.viii.1).[24] In both these episodes, it is as if the narrator bases his interpretation of events on an uncritical acceptance of a character's self-

representation -- Hellenore as morally weak victim of Paridell's seduction, and Proteus as trustworthy and charitable rescuer -- at the expense of the larger context which reveals clearly the disingenuousness of these self-descriptions.

In fact, there will be no instances, in Book Three (with one possible exception, which I shall come to at the end of this chapter), of the straightforward kind of rescue which was effected by the intervention of divine grace in the action of Books One and Two. Florimell's rescue by Proteus, which relieves her of the immediate danger to her chastity only to place her in the same danger again at the hands of her deliverer, is typical not only of the ready transformation of would-be rescuer to would-be rapist which marks her whole story, but also of the new and more morally complex relationship, in Book Three generally, between the courses of events in which virtuous characters find themselves inescapably engaged, and the heavenly powers which are said to exercise providential care over these characters' lives.

In the first book of The Faerie Queene, the effect of divine intervention in human affairs is unequivocal and dramatic: namely, to convert what would be the defeat of the virtuous into their victory over the powers that oppress them, by manipulating apparent chance events, at the moments of greatest danger, to the resounding advantage of the good. Thus, for example, it appears,

superficially, to be mere good fortune (I.xi.29) or freak chance (I.xi.45) that the Redcross knight, at the moments when he seems most certain to be overcome by the dragon, falls not on the open field where he would be slain, but in places where he will be protected, and his powers restored, first by the well, then by the tree, of life; but a parenthetical remark makes clear to the reader what Una apparently knows when she praises God for the knight's eventual victory (I.xi.55), namely, that "eternall God that chaunce did guide" (I.xi.45). Similarly, when a blow from Orgoglio's club lays Arthur on the ground and puts him in immediate danger of defeat, the fact that "in his fall his shield, that couered was,/ Did loose his vele" is superficially attributed to "chaunce" (I.viii.19), but the beams that blaze forth from the "sunshiny shield" (I.viii.20) and render the giant defenseless are associated with divine intervention through an analogy drawn between their effects and those of "th'Almighties lightning brond" (I.viii.21).

In the third book, divine intervention in human affairs operates rather differently: although, as before, it intervenes, through what appears to be the operation of mere good fortune, at the moment of the virtuous characters' greatest need, unlike in Book One it does not dramatically convert apparent defeat into unequivocal victory, but rather only averts irrecoverable disaster -- repeatedly, if necessary -- without radically

transforming the general situation, much less bringing events to an immediate favourable conclusion. Thus, when Florimell, on the verge of being caught and devoured by a Hyena-like beast, and ready to leap suicidally into the sea in her desperation to avoid that fate, finds a little boat lying on the beach, this means of escape is attributed superficially to fortune, but parenthetically to "high God" who "did... ordaine" that it should be there (III.vii.27); but this boat, far from solving her problems once and for all, turns out to contain a brutal old man who tries to rape her, requiring another, similar intervention in the form of what seems to be the mere chance arrival of Proteus ("It fortuned, whilest thus she stifly stroue,/ And the wide sea importuned long space/ With shrilling shriekes, *Proteus* abroad did roue") but which is ultimately ascribed, once again, to the "high God" who is said to bring that apparent chance to pass (III.viii.29). Yet once more, the divinely-ordained means of deliverance turns out to be the source of yet more persecution, in what seems -- at least for the duration of Florimell's adventures in Book Three -- to be an endlessly repeating pattern from which there is no ultimate escape.

This sort of divine intervention can leave a rather ambivalent impression upon the reader, in comparison to the effect of the clear reversals of fortune brought about by acts of God in Book One. For it gives the sense

that, in delivering the beleaguered character out of one danger only by delivering her into another instance of the same or a similar danger, providence is as responsible for *perpetuating* the agonizing misadventure -- for endlessly deferring its resolution -- as for ensuring that the trials of the virtuous never end in unmitigated disaster. This sense of ambivalence is further aggravated if we observe that Florimell's seemingly endless string of misadventures is not merely perpetuated by these peculiarly indecisive interventions on the part of God, but was actually *initiated* by heavenly design as well: for as we are told, it was actually a part of "the vnknowen purpose of eternall fate" that the ambiguity of Proteus's prophecy should deceive Cymoent, and so lead to Marinell's grievous injury and hence to Florimell's leaving Faery Court in search of him, thus exposing herself, unwittingly, to the dangers that soon convert her quest into a desperate flight. It is, we may conclude, the whole apparently endless cycle of immediate threat and narrow escape for which the divine power that both provokes Florimell's flight and drives it on from one episode to the next is responsible. In this respect, the moral ambiguity which Florimell perceives in all her would-be rescuers may seem to belong also, or even primarily, to the "high God" who is, throughout the 1590 installment of The Faerie Queene, the ultimate rescuer of virtuous characters in distress,

but who seems, in Florimell's case, to be, like all those who come ostensibly to give her "succour" (III.viii.29), a persecutor as much as a deliverer.

Nor is Florimell's problematic relationship with the divine will an isolated phenomenon. Just as, in her case, the effect of providence is not (as it was for Redcross and Arthur in Book One) to bring about, once and for all, a decisive victory in the face of apparent defeat, but rather to propel her into a kind of perpetual motion in which she oscillates continually between the brink of final disaster and the prospect of genuine relief, so, in Book Three generally, the divine purpose in human history is expressed not as the promise of a final, apocalyptic victory of good over evil, but rather as the promise of the *perpetuation* of the Trojan bloodline, whose fortunes have varied, and will vary, from generation to generation, from the brink of extermination -- as at the sack of Troy itself (III.ix.39), and again at the Saxon conquest of Britain (III.iii.41-42) -- to the moments of glory, themselves inevitably fleeting, represented by the imperial dominion first of Troy, then of Rome, and one day of Elizabethan England's "*Troynouant*" (III.ix.44-45). The disasters which punctuate this history, as much as the moments of glory, are attributed, unequivocally, to the divine will: just as it was the direct result of divine intervention that Troy fell (III.ix.34), so too, says Merlin, it shall

be because "th'heauens haue decreed, to displace/ The *Britons*" that they will, in turn, perforce, "to the *Saxons* ouer-giue their gouernment" (III.iii.41). Like Florimell, who is driven ever onwards, over land and sea, in what seems an endless flight, by a divine will apparently as intent on continually renewing her trials as on sparing her from irremediable catastrophe, so too the sons of Troy are driven, by land and sea, from trial to trial, by the "fatall course" (III.ix.49) of that same equivocal destiny which ensures that the bloodline, however decimated, is never wholly extinguished. It is in this context that we must place Britomart's love for Arthegall -- itself apparently caused by "fortune" but actually brought to pass by "the streight course of heauenly destiny,/ Led with eternall prouidence" (III.iii.24) -- in order to comprehend why its consequences, in spite of Merlin's assurances, refuse so persistently to seem wholly innocuous. Divine intervention in the course of her life, like divine intervention in the Legend of Chastity generally, is to lead not to one decisive outcome but to a whole continuing history of consequences, which in the case of Merlin's prophecy to Britomart include Arthegall's premature death as well as the promise of their fertile marriage (III.iii.28), and centuries of oppressive foreign domination as well as a period of imperial rule for their offspring (III.iii.42). Even the words with

which Merlin ends his prophecy to Britomart, "But yet the end is not" (III.iii.50), are strongly charged with the ambivalence that marks the history of the Trojan people at large: on one hand, they promise that the passing of the Elizabethan moment will not mark the end of the history of Britomart's progeny (which may seem counterfactual, given the certainty, by 1590, of the extinction of the house of Tudor, but we should recall that Elizabeth was, after all, to be succeeded by a blood relative, albeit not by her own descendent); on the other hand -- as is intimated by the narrator's suggestion that Merlin may have fallen silent at this point upon beholding some "ghastly spectacle.../ That secretly he saw, yet note discoure" (III.iii.50) -- they are a sobering reminder that so long as her descendents' history continues, so too must their trials and tribulations.

The kind of divine intervention in the course of history which characterizes the third book of The Faerie Queene is essentially classical in conception, as is the particular strand of history, namely the fate of the Trojans after the fall of Troy, to which Book Three continually refers: both are derived, at least in large part, either directly or through the intermediary of the British chronicle tradition from Virgil's Aeneid. Although it is (apparently) the Christian God to whom the divine interventions in the lives of Britomart and

Florimell are ascribed, His role in the Legend of Chastity is never clearly distinguished from that of the pagan gods, to whom Spenser continues to give their conventional function of intervening in the same way and even in the same story. In particular, His role is conflated with that of the classical gods of love: of Venus, who is described as intervening in the history of the Trojans by initiating the love affair of Paris and Helen (III.ix.34), and especially of Cupid, who in Book Three is described, and generally treated, as the source of all chivalric virtue and the agent through whom "the fatall purpose of diuine foresight" is brought to pass (III.iii.1-2). Nor is it simply that Venus and Cupid are introduced into the action as merely the agents of a higher Christian deity, whose deeper and specifically Christian purpose is seen to work through them; rather, His use, in the Legend of Chastity, of classical, erotic love as a vehicle for His intervention in the world renders Christian providence, in practice, indistinguishable from the classical force of "fate" (III.iii.24 *etc.*) which had itself frequently been represented, from Homer onwards, as a power superior to the will of the individual pagan gods. Indeed, it is inevitable that the substitution of *eros* for Christian charity, as the agent of the divine will in human affairs, changes the very nature and impact of God's influence in the world. For *eros*, as opposed to charity, is intrinsically a worldly

force -- the power of natural reproduction, as opposed to the power of spiritual regeneration -- and as such it drives events *laterally*, along the repetitious and morally ambiguous ground of secular history, rather than *vertically*, toward a final, otherworldly goal. *Eros* is worldly, too, in that it partakes of, and contributes to, the morally ambiguous nature of worldly events: thus, for example, it is the motivation both of the chase that propels Florimell in her flight and of the rescues that intervene periodically to defer her being caught; and as such, it is the underlying explanation of the fact that, in Book Three, chase and rescue, evil and good, often collapse, in practice, into a single, morally ambivalent event.

One important consequence of the fact that the Christian God's involvement in the Legend of Chastity is essentially of the same kind as that associated with the pagan gods is that He is no longer available, as He was, for example, in the Legend of Holiness, as a point of refuge from the moral relativism that threatens the Spenserian cosmos when it seems to be presided over by the Olympian and chthonic deities of the classical pantheon. In Book One, as the Redcross knight stooped to behaving no better than his faithless adversary in a duel, so too the Olympian gods themselves -- who were described, at least by his opponents, as the knight's divine patrons -- began to seem no better than their own

cosmic adversaries; but as Redcross emerged from his morally relativistic behaviour, so too the threat of cosmic relativism was swept aside, as a distinction was revealed between the merciless Olympians and the redeeming Christian God who (it now emerged) was the knight's *proper* patron (see Chapter One, pp. 207-13). In Book Three, there is a similar correspondence between events human and divine: as love obtrudes suddenly upon the main chivalric action of the poem, blurring the boundaries which had previously distinguished virtue from vice, so too the god of Love makes a sweeping conquest over the Olympian gods, transforming them, the supposed patrons of the virtuous, into the most notorious persecutors of the virtue which the Legend of Chastity celebrates -- into romping Ovidian rapists in an action already brutalized by the ever-present threat of rape (III.xi.29*ff*).[25] At the same time, the chthonic deities, without entirely losing their accustomed fearful aspect, begin suddenly to be celebrated as fecund sources of life (III.vi.36). Indeed, as I will show in what follows, in canto six, where the action of Book Three shifts (as in the underworld journey in Book One) from the mortal to the divine plane, the very boundaries are broken down between the respective spheres of influence of the Olympian and chthonic deities whom we are accustomed to thinking of as intractable enemies, the cosmic patrons, respectively, of good and evil; rather than relieving, in

any way, the sense of moral (and semantic) confusion which characterizes the surrounding chivalric action, this scene is a *tour de force* of moral and semantic ambiguity. But unlike in the Legend of Holiness, there will be no reassuring emergence, in the Legend of Chastity, from the confusion which threatens to overtake both the mortal and divine worlds once love usurps the action; rather, as I have already shown, the Christian God who acted as a kind of *deus ex machina* in rescuing Book One from moral relativism is Himself deeply implicated in sponsoring the kind of morally ambivalent action that is characteristic of Book Three. The vision of the cosmos embodied in the Garden of Adonis stands, in effect, 'unretracted' -- at least within the Legend of Chastity and thus within the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene.[26]

A great deal has been written about the philosophical underpinnings of Spenser's Garden of Adonis, which I will not attempt to survey here, other than to observe that there has been a long-standing (or at least recurrent) debate as to whether Spenser was trying in this passage to present a single, coherent natural philosophy, or whether he was content, rather, to present in an attractive poetic form a mere hodgepodge of thematically related images, all of them based loosely in philosophical discourse.[27] It will already be clear, I think, that my own position is somewhat closer to the

latter view, in that it seems to me that the Garden of Adonis passage does not present a coherent philosophical vision. But I differ in seeing the fact of this incoherence as itself thematically important and indeed as indicative of the role of this passage in the Legend of Chastity as a whole.[28] Also, it seems to me that writers on both sides of this debate, though particularly those on the former, have shown too great a willingness simply to 'translate' the images that Spenser gives us -- from the garden itself to Venus and Adonis to the "babes" (III.vi.32) that wait at the gate -- into more strictly philosophical terms, like "forme" and "substance" (III.vi.35-38), whose direct discussion by Spenser actually takes up a relatively small portion of the whole passage, without giving much regard either to the literal meanings of the images or to how these images might be related to the figurative meanings that they are construed as having. My aim, in what follows, is to observe as closely as possible what it is that Spenser *describes*, before proceeding to the question of what it all might *mean*.

The main difficulty in interpreting the description of the "*Gardin* of *Adonis*" (III.vi.29,39), it seems to me, lies in the question whether the "Gardin" (III.vi.30, 33,41) has a literal or only a figurative existence -- that is, whether it exists *as a garden* -- in the world inhabited by the characters who undertake the main

strands of action in the Legend of Chastity.[29] It is worth noting at the outset, I think, that this question is very similar to the one which Augustine poses about the Garden of Eden (which the Garden of Adonis closely resembles in many important respects[30]): namely, whether the Garden described in Genesis should be thought of as having (or having had) a literal existence in that real, material world wherein all subsequent Biblical history was understood literally to have taken place.[31] Augustine argues forcefully that the Garden of Eden did literally exist in this historical world, and that, albeit the garden and the things in it might *also* have figurative meanings -- as, for example, the tree of life which grew there was understood, in the light of Proverbs 3:18, to *mean* wisdom -- this does not diminish at all the literal, historical status of the garden or the things in it: although they "signified something other than what they were... none the less they themselves existed in the world of material reality."[32] In the terms which I have been using, the things in the Garden are, for Augustine, to be understood as *symbols* (see Introduction (1): pp. 37-9). The situation with respect to Spenser's Garden of Adonis is somewhat more complicated, as we shall see; but let us begin by considering the evidence for its literal existence within the world inhabited by the characters who take part in the main action of the Legend of Chastity.

The principal support that Augustine gives for his conclusion as to the status of the Garden of Eden is the example of Adam, who himself leaves the garden to play a role -- that of primogenitor -- in Biblical history at large, clearly establishing that he, and the garden where he originally lived, must from the beginning have been a part of the same world wherein Biblical history at large was to be played out.[33] The same sort of situation clearly obtains with respect to the Garden of Adonis. For if it were not literally a garden -- if it were *only* (as various commentators have argued) the human body, or the womb, or the state in which unembodied forms or vegetative souls pre-exist their incarnation[34] -- then the character Amoret could scarcely have been "brought" there, *after* her birth, "To be vpbrought in goodly womanhed" (III.vi.28-29), nor could she have come from there to Faery Court as a mature, marriageable woman (III.vi.52). This literal existence of the garden *within* the material world inhabited by the poem's mortal characters is further reinforced by the narrator's specific statements that it exists "on earth" (III.vi.29) and that "It sited was in fruitfull soyle of old" (III.vi.31) -- characterizations which also develop the analogy between this garden's situation and that of the Biblical Eden.[35] The further description of the Garden of Adonis as "the first seminarie/ Of all things, that are borne to liue and die" (III.vi.30) elaborates upon

the nature of its literal existence in the world -- for a seminary, or seed bed, is not a place where things exist *prior* to their coming into the world, but rather where they are grown *from* the seed until they are ready to be transplanted: in other words, it is a place where things spend that period of their lives which Amoret spends in the Garden of Adonis, as she is raised from infancy to the "perfect ripenesse" in which she is ready to be "brought... forth into the worldes vew" as a marriageable young woman (III.vi.52).[36]

At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that there are substantial problems with interpreting the Garden of Adonis in this way, different from any that arose for Augustine in his literal reading of the story of Genesis. To take but one important example, not all of the "babes" (III.vi.32) that are described as being nurtured in the Garden of Adonis are like those two "babes" (III.vi.27) that Diana and Venus take it upon themselves to raise; for unlike Belphoebe and Amoret, the "thousand thousand naked babes" that wait at a gate of the garden, hoping to be let out, have yet to be clothed "with fleshly weedes" (III.vi.32), implying that their existence *in* the garden is unembodied, and that their going "into the world" refers not merely to their leaving a walled enclave removed from sinfulness (that is, not merely what 'going into the world' would mean for the members of an enclosed monastic order) but to their

entering an incarnate state from a pre-incarnate state of existence. Such "babes" are obviously not "babes" in the ordinary, literal sense at all[37], as the various commentators on the passage presumably have understood who have debated as to what these "babes" *are*, given that they *cannot* literally be babies: whether unembodied rational souls, seminal reasons, Aristotelean vegetative souls, or what have you.[38] Now, none of these precise meanings is offered by the text; but what is clear is that, like the souls in Plato's myth of Er or the shades in Virgil's underworld, who similarly wait one thousand years between periods of incarnation, the existence of these "babes" in the garden is an existence outside the span of mortal, corporeal life.[39]

We have, then, two essentially opposite interpretations of the Garden of Adonis, both of which the text seems to demand: on one hand, it is a material place, which is "on earth", and where living things, including Amoret, spend the early part of their incarnate lives, until such time as they are ready to be 'transplanted' into the world outside the garden walls; on the other hand, it is an immaterial 'place', (III.vi.32)), where things that *will* live, but which are not living yet, await their incarnation and their entry into life.[40] These two different interpretations cannot be reconciled by supposing that the things in this Garden, like those in Augustine's Garden of Eden, are

symbols which have two meanings at once; for the problem is not simply that certain of the things in the garden, like the "thousand thousand naked babes", besides being meant literally, are *also* given a figurative meaning. On the contrary, the "babes" are construed as having a figurative meaning only because the context in which they are introduced *precludes* their being meant literally: babies without flesh are not, in the first place, literally babies, any more than flesh is literally a suit of clothes. The immediate context of the image "babes", in stanza 32, demands that it *not* be understood literally, while at the same time, the larger context constituted by the story of Amoret and Belphoebe demands that at least one of the "babes" in the garden *is* to be understood literally. And because the question of what the "babes" are is inseparable from the question of what the "Gardin" is which they enter and leave, so, by extension, the whole of the garden *must*, and at the same time *must not*, be understood to have a literal existence as a garden within the world of mortality and materiality in which the Legend of Chastity takes place. Faced with this paradox, we as readers are left to hover, with acute semantic double vision, between the two irreconcilable readings of what we see -- unless, of course, like Arthur after his failed pursuit of Florimell, we try by means of our own commentary to redraw the lines which ordinarily distinguish literal from figurative meanings.

To take a concrete example of the undecidable status of the imagery that makes up the description of the Garden of Adonis, let us consider what we are to make of the statement that "double gates it had, which opened wide,/ By which both in and out men moten pas" (III.vi.31). This description of the gates of the garden immediately follows its depiction (III.vi.28-30) as a place "on earth" where Amoret was taken by Venus to be "fostered" from infancy to "womanhed", and which serves as a nursery or "seminarie" for other living things as well; consequently, the most natural first reading of the lines is a literal one: ordinary living "men", presuming that they can find the garden ("Whether in *Paphos*, or *Cytheron* hill,/ Or it in *Gnidus* be" (III.vi.29)), are at liberty to go "in and out" through its open "gates", just as Guyon, having survived his perilous sea voyage, was free to enter the "gate" of the Bower of Bliss "that euer open stood to all" (II.xii.46). But on the other hand, this initial statement about the gates of the garden is followed immediately by the account of "Old *Genius* the porter" and the "thousand thousand naked babes" whom he allows out at one gateway, eventually to "returne backe by the hinder gate" (III.vi.31-2); this passage, as we have seen, demands that the "double gates" of the garden be understood figuratively, as 'gates' of birth and death. Once the "gates" are understood to mean birth and death, a non-literal interpretation becomes necessary of

the fact that, through these gates, "both in and out men moten pas": namely, that human beings are both born and killed. The two different contexts of the passage yield two different meanings, which contribute, respectively, to our two irreconcilable understandings of the garden as a material place of the living and as an immaterial place of the dead (meaning by 'the dead' whatever it is that pre-exists and survives the incarnate life of individuals).

Nor is the question of what kind of "babes" are raised in the Garden the only source of difficulty for a reader who wants to determine its semantic status within the world of The Faerie Queene. Throughout its description, the Garden drifts semantically back and forth across the line that might be expected to divide these two irreconcilable interpretations from one another. Thus, the description of the "babes" who run through a repeated cycle of being "clothed" by Genius with "fleshly weedes" and sent out to live "in mortall state" (III.vi.32-33) is followed a few stanzas later (III.vi.37-8) by an account of "substances" which run through a repeated cycle of being 'clothed' with "forme and feature" ("For euery substance is conditioned/ To change her hew, and sundry formes to don"), with the result that each substance "Becomes a bodie" and is ready to "inuade/ The state of life, out of the griesly shade." The two descriptions are so similar that it is natural to

assume that they both describe the same process, but in different terms: that the "babes" are "substances", the "fleshly weedes" which are subject to "corruption" (III.vi.33) equivalent to the "formes" which "are variable and decay" (III.vi.38), and going "forth to liue in mortall state" the same as to "inuade/ The state of life".[41] But no sooner has this solution suggested itself than we are confronted with a problem, namely that unlike the "babes", whose going "forth to liue in mortall state" is clearly equivalent to leaving the garden, the "substances" which "inuade/ The state of life" clearly remain *in* the garden once they have done so. For the mutable "formes" which the "substances" assume are destroyed by time not *outside* the garden, where "Fleshly corruption" besets the "babes", but *inside* the garden, where Venus, "When walking through the Gardin", beholds the pitiful spectacle of their destruction (III.vi.39-40).[42] A narratorial comment makes explicit the transition that has occurred: whereas previously, the "mortall state" of life was what existed *outside* the Garden, now the vulnerability of the things growing *in* the garden to destruction by Time is to be seen as an example of the mortality of "all that liues" (III.vi.40). But it is not possible to discover the exact point at which the things growing inside the garden walls ceased representing the *alternative* to "mortall state" and became instead representative *examples* of "all that

liues". For in retrospect, we can see that, despite the suggestive analogy between the "babes" with their clothing of "fleshly weedes" and the "substances" with their clothing of "forme and feature", an identity between the two was never asserted.[43] In fact, a quite different analogy also exists between the "babes" which are "planted" in the Garden between their successive incarnations (III.vi.33) and the "formes" or "shapes" which are also planted in the Garden, "ranckt in comely rew". If we understand the "babes" to be the same things, or the same kind of things, as the "formes" or "shapes", then clearly the "babes" cannot also be the same as the "substances" which are able "sundry formes to don"; so the two processes whereby the "babes" are dressed in "fleshly weedes" and the "substances" are dressed in "formes" must be distinct.[44] But this interpretation also runs us into a contradiction: for if the "babes" are the same as the "formes", then what is said at one point (III.vi.33) to be that which remains constantly in existence through successive incarnations, is described at another point (III.vi.37-38) as what "does fade" and "decay" and needs to be replaced at each successive incarnation, as *opposed* to what survives unchanged through successive embodiments. Once again, though from a different direction, we arrive at the problem that what grows in the garden seems at one point to be immutable and to survive the vicissitudes of life

and even death itself, but at another point to be the very thing in life which constantly changes and which death finally destroys. Indeed, the problem is unavoidable, for while the description of what takes place in the garden progresses from one set of images to the next by a series of apparently natural analogies and successions, in fact it all the while veers freely between poles of meaning which are opposite and irreconcilable.[45] Thus the account of the "babes" who go for a time "into the world" and who are "planted" again in the garden upon their return from "mortall state", seems to lead naturally to a more detailed description (III.vi.35) of what is planted in the garden to be sent forth eventually "Into the world" (III.vi.36); mention of the fact that these things are continually going out "Into the world, it to replenish more" then leads to the question of how it is that "the stocke" of the things which replenish the world is "not lessened, nor spent" (III.vi.36); and the answer to this question, that there is "An huge eternall *Chaos*, which supplyes/ The substances of natures fruitfull progenyes" (III.vi.36), leads to a discussion of how each of these substances "Becomes a bodie" ready to "inuade/ The state of life" -- which seems to bring us back (although the vocabulary has now changed) to the original account of how the things grown in the garden are embodied in preparation for mortal existence. But as we have seen, by the time we

have gone around this apparent circle of connected descriptions, it is far from clear that the point where we arrive is the same as the point where we began: indeed, attempts to identify the one description of embodiment with the other yield glaring contradictions. And yet it is not possible to say at which link the chain of connections is broken, for upon rereading we find that in no case was a connection ever directly asserted, but rather each one was only implied by the apparently natural flow from one thought to the next. As a result, the exact relationship among any of the various aspects of the garden's description becomes impossible to determine. The only thing which does become clear is that the attempt to specify these relationships precisely will inevitably bring to the fore the contradiction between the Garden's two opposite and irreconcilable meanings.

Another instance of the paradoxical nature of the Garden is its self-contradictory relationship to the classical, chthonic underworld. On one hand, the description of the "babes" which "returne" to the garden from "mortall state" to "remaine" there for "Some thousand yeares" before being either "clad with other hew,/ Or sent into the chaungefull world againe" (III.vi.32-33) clearly indicates that the Garden is a place of afterlife and pre-existence, similar in its dynamics to that which was described in Virgil's Aeneid,

and which Virgil had placed in the chthonic underworld beyond the river Styx.[46] On the other hand, Venus is described as withholding Adonis from the "*Stygian* Gods" who preside over the underworld where the shades of the dead must go; and this implies that the Garden of Adonis is *not* a place of the dead equivalent to the classical underworld (although it clearly *was* this a few stanzas earlier), but rather exists in *opposition* to this underworld, as a place where Venus, by transforming her beloved youth from one form to another so that he will always "liue" (III.vi.47), can protect him from the gods who would take him away to the land of the dead. Paradoxically, the Garden is a refuge, on one hand, from the very thing with which it has been identified, on the other.

The respective places, in the Garden, of the Olympian Venus and the chthonic or underworld gods is unclear also with regard to the Garden's power of generation. On one hand, Venus seems to represent a complementary principle to Adonis, "the Father of all formes" (III.vi.47), leading to the suggestion that she is the source of matter in the garden's generative process.[47] On the other hand, the "Infinite shapes" and "formes" which grow in the garden (III.vi.35) are described as receiving "matter" not from Venus, but from "An huge eternall *Chaos*, which supplyes/ The substances of natures fruitfull progenyes" (III.vi.36-7). The conclusion must

be either that the roles of the Olympian goddess Venus and ultimate chthonic goddess Chaos are conflated, or that Venus and Chaos are themselves conflated; in either case, the distinction between sky-gods and earth-gods, which was so clearly drawn in the first two books of The Faerie Queene, appears no longer to be in force.

Yet another instance of the Garden's ambivalent status relative to the world of mortal existence is the fact that normally animate beings -- that is, humans, beasts, birds, and fish -- are described, on one hand, as existing in the Garden devoid of the souls that ordinarily animate them, and sprouting inanimately from the ground like mere plants (III.vi.35), but on the other hand as having a fully animate existence there, the birds behaving like ordinary birds (or at least, like ordinary birds in the springtime), choosing their mates (III.vi.41) and making "their pastime/ Emongst the shadie leaues" (III.vi.42), and, more generally, all creatures actively going about the business of "sweet loue" (III.vi.41). The question of whether the creatures in the garden are animate or inanimate is of course related to the question of whether the garden is a place of mortal life or of some kind of pre-existence; it is also related to the ambivalent status of Adonis himself, who was once a youth, subsequently a flower (and thus in much the same state as the things "ranckt in comely rew" in the garden's various "bed[s]" (III.vi.35)), and who now,

amidst his continual transformations, seems to have some of the qualities both of plant and of animal, being, on one hand, apparently as passive as a flower with respect to Venus' "will", but on the other hand, quite capable of the "wanton" activity which she "often" desires of him (III.vi.46).

To summarize briefly: in the Garden of Adonis, the lines are continually crossed, and therefore the distinctions ultimately impossible to draw, between the literal and the figurative, the material and the immaterial, the living and the dead, the Olympian and the chthonic, the animate and the inanimate, even the animal and the plant. I add one final pair to this list, by way of transition to the discussion of another episode, namely the mortal and the divine. In the sixth canto of Book Three generally, the pagan gods interact directly with mortal characters in a way that does not happen in the rest of the book -- with the *possible* exception of the episode of the House of Busyrane, to which I shall come in a moment. Of course, Cupid is described in other episodes as interacting with mortal characters, in the sense that he is said to shoot his arrows at them (III.ii.26,*etc.*); but these arrows do not literally exist for the characters who are described as being wounded by them, and Cupid himself is liable to be treated as merely a dispensable figurative representation of the power which causes their love (III.iii.1-2). The situation in

the story of Amoret's upbringing is quite different: she *literally* interacts with Cupid, with Cupid's mother Venus, and with Cupid's "true loue faire *Psyche*", to whom Amoret is "Committed... yfostered to bee,/ And trained vp in true feminitee" (III.vi.50-51). The literal nature of her interaction with the pagan gods of love causes Amoret no problem so long as she resides in the Garden of Adonis, where Cupid sets "his sad darts/ Aside"; but this situation will change radically once she is brought forth "into the world".

The episode in which Britomart rescues Amoret from the House of Busyrane is -- like the description of the Garden of Adonis, although in a different way -- an astonishing *tour de force* of ambiguity. But there is, at least, one aspect of the situation which is clearly and consistently presented, namely that, whatever else it may *also* mean by virtue of a symbolic status, the "house of Busyrane" (III.xi.Arg.) first of all exists literally as a "Castle" (III.xi.21) in the world inhabited by Britomart and the other main characters of the Legend of Chastity.[48] In this castle, Amoret is literally imprisoned and tormented by the enchanter Busirane partly as a jealous punishment for the fact that she "will not denay" her love for Scudamore (III.xi.11), and partly in a rather heavy-handed attempt to gain her love for himself: "by torture he would her constraine/ Loue to conceiue in her disdainfull brest" (III.xi.17). So far,

this is straightforward enough, albeit perverse; but the situation becomes more complex in view of the specific form that Amoret's torments take. For if Amoret's tortures were merely tortures -- if the effect that they were intended to have on her were merely the literal effects that torture can have in breaking a person's will -- then any old torture would do, and Busyrane might as well have just stretched her on a rack as to have gone to all the trouble of removing her heart from her breast in order to pierce it with an arrow, and of parading her around, in this state, in the midst of a triumphal masque (III.xii.21). Clearly her tortures are meant to signify something specific, namely the conventional effects of having fallen in love, as we have seen them described throughout The Faerie Queene, which include, principally, having one's heart wounded with an arrow, and being subjected to the cruel tyranny of the god of Love.[49] But the problem of interpretation arises when we try to determine the *sense* in which Amoret's tortures signify these conventional effects.

One possibility that cannot easily be discounted is that Busyrane is simply literal-minded to a fault (and a grievous fault, at that). Failing to note that, conventionally, the arrow-wound and tyranny which torment the lover have, for the one who suffers them, only a figurative and not a literal existence, he subjects Amoret to these torments literally, naively supposing, as

he does so, that her suffering these things on his behalf will mean that she is in love with him. Busyrane might have been betrayed into this literal-minded understanding of love by the visual art tradition, which is amply on display in his house, wherein lovers may be "painted full of burning darts" (III.xi.44), as if love were *literally* a matter of arrows and fire. According to this interpretation, the principal effect of Busyrane's magical powers is to place Amoret in a situation which, had it been brought about without the aid of magic, would surely have killed her. Whether his spells allow him actually to remove and pierce her heart without killing her (as seems to be the case in III.xii.21) or merely to create the convincing illusion that he has done so (as is suggested by III.xii.31) is not terribly important: in either case, Amoret experiences literally what conventionally the lover suffers only figuratively.

Another possible interpretation of the situation is that Busyrane is fully aware of the figurative nature of the love conventions, but subjects Amoret to them literally as part of a magical project whose ultimate goal is to enchant her into the state of being in love with him that his props figuratively represent. This interpretation would explain why, when Britomart arrives on the scene, Busyrane is still engaged in casting spells, and why Amoret seems to deserve praise for her resistance to what, according to our first interpretation

of the scene, could scarcely be considered much of a temptation (III.xii.31). According to this reading, the gap still exists between the literalized conventions of love from which Amoret suffers and the figurative effects that Busyrane intends them to represent; but unlike in our previous reading, that gap is not produced by a mere ineptitude in Busyrane's understanding, but rather is one which his magic powers threaten pressingly to close so long as he keeps her in his power. Should he have succeeded in enchanting Amoret, her literal tortures would in effect have become *symbols*, standing figuratively for the love which she would in fact have felt for him.

Yet another possibility, and one which is also difficult to discount, is that Amoret's literal sufferings actually symbolize from the outset the love which she already feels, namely her love for Scudamore, just as in an earlier episode Timias' literal sufferings clearly symbolized his love for Belphoebe. For this reading to be viable, it has to be explained how it is that, after Amoret's heart is healed of its arrow-wound (III.xii.38), she nevertheless continues to love Scudamore (III.xii.41*ff*); but this presents no great problem, for one has only to suppose that her literal tortures symbolized not the love *per se*, but only the conventionally miserable state of the lover, which she casts aside, along with the literal tortures that

symbolize it, when she goes forth to enjoy the unmitigated "pleasure" of her husband's company.[50] This interpretation is bolstered by a suggestion toward the end of the episode that the House of Busyrane from whose torments she has been freed was, all along, a symbol of "Her body, late the prison of sad paine,/ Now the sweet lodge of loue and deare delight" (III.xii.45); for if the house is a symbol of her body, then it seems to follow naturally that the torments which take place inside the house symbolize the torments which take place inside her body, which can only mean the torments of love, and whose only object can be Scudamore, whom alone she loves. According to this last reading, the episode in the House of Busyrane brings to its ultimate conclusion the process which has been taking place throughout Book Three, whereby the conventional -- and conventionally figurative -- effects of love have taken on an increasingly literal existence for the characters involved in the action. Thus Arthur confuses his literal pursuit of Florimell with his figurative pursuit of the Faery Queen, but at least suffers only figuratively from a wounded heart; and while, in the following episode, Timias suffers literally the *effects* of a wound, there is still no arrow to be seen literally protruding from his chest; but for Amoret, the arrow-wound itself, and not only its incapacitating effects, has a gruesomely literal existence.

Which of these interpretations is valid (if, indeed,

any one of them can be proved more valid than the others) might be decided by the status of the triumphal procession in which Amoret is paraded around the house (III.xii.5-26), and more specifically, by the answer to the question whether it is *really* "the winged God himselfe" (III.xii.22) who presides over this event or whether, instead, what is described as "the winged God himselfe" is merely an actor playing his part. For if it is really the god Cupid who gloats over "his proud spoyle of that same dolorous/ Faire Dame" (III.xii.22), then there cannot be much doubt that the wound from which she suffers is genuinely (that is to say, symbolically) a love wound; whereas, if this Cupid were merely an actor, then the masque would have to be understood quite differently, as a spectacle which Busyrane stages as a part of his attempt -- whether naive or otherwise -- to make Amoret fall in love with him.

But, as it turns out, the status of the procession, and of the "the winged God" within it, is not readily decidable. For on one hand, the event is likened to a masque or a stage show (III.xii.3-5) -- although, so far as its participants know, there is no one there to watch it (III.xii.27) -- and its presenters are described as "disguized" (III.xii.26), which suggests that they are all merely actors playing parts. But on the other hand, the procession's likeness to a play or masque does not necessarily indicate that it *is* one, only that it looks a

great deal *like* one; we may recall, for comparison's sake, that the same could be said about Lucifera's royal progress (I.iv.16*ff*), wherein the participants, as it happened, were not merely actors but rather actual personifications of the deadly sins. As in that scene, the personages in the 'masque of Cupid' are generally referred to not as though they were actors, but as if they genuinely possessed the characters and the feelings which befit their parts in the procession (III.xii.9-13); this seems particularly to be the case with "*Dissemblance*" (III.xii.14) and "*Griefe*" (III.xii.16), in both of whose cases inner feelings, which they do not show outwardly, contribute in important ways to their fulfillment of their roles -- a detail which would seem to make little sense if these were merely actors. And yet, for all this, we could still suppose that these *are* merely actors, after all, and that the narrator, serving for the moment as a commentator on the performance, describes directly what it is intended to signify, rather than continually reminding us that it is, after all, only a pretense. In this case, his reference to one of the performers as "the winged God himselfe" would be simply a part of the general suspension of disbelief which characterizes his account of the masque generally. There is, I think, no way to decide among these alternatives: the Cupid who triumphs over Amoret may, or may not, be the real Cupid with whom she consorted on more friendly

terms in the Garden of Adonis.

The effect of the simultaneous possibility of the various interpretations that I have suggested for the events in the House of Busyrane is to make the whole episode, in a sense, uninterpretable. In particular, it is difficult to know whether Cupid himself -- and therefore love, or at least a certain kind of love -- should be thought of as the direct cause of the great torments which Amoret endures, or whether instead she suffers not from her love at all but rather from Busyrane's attempts to produce love in her with the aid of physical props. What is important to note, however, is that the uninterpretability of the House of Busyrane is a problem faced not only by a reader approaching the scene from outside the imaginary world presented by the poem, but also for Britomart, the character who confronts it from within. Britomart herself, it is made clear, never fully comprehends the precise meaning of all that she sees in Busyrane's castle.[51] Thus, for example, when she spies the words "*Be bold*" written over a door,

> ...she oft and oft it ouer-red,
> Yet could not find what sence it figured...
>
> (III.xi.50).

Similarly, when she encounters further inscriptions of "*Be bold, be bold,* and euery where *Be bold,*" she is unable to "construe it/ By any ridling skill, or commune

wit"; and when she then sees "Another yron dore, on which was writ,/ *Be not too bold*", she fails, in spite of her best efforts, to conceive "what it might intend" (III.xii.54). Later, after the masque disappears behind this "yron dore", she wrongly guesses that the same spectacle will reappear the following night (III.xii.28). But in spite of her uncertainties and errors in interpreting the House of Busyrane, Britomart responds successfully to the challenge that it poses. The reason for her success, it appears, is that she keeps her mind continually focused upon the mission that she has taken in hand, namely to "Deliuer" Amoret "fro thence, or with her... [to] dy" (III.xi.18). Thus, for example, when confronted by her inability to discern the significance of the first of the inscriptions,

> She was no whit thereby discouraged
> From prosecuting of her first intent,
> But forward with bold steps into the next roome went.
>
> (III.xi.50).

In general, the precise meaning of all that goes on around her in the House of Busyrane is less important to Britomart than is the role of rescuer which she has taken on, and which she sustains single-mindedly until Amoret is freed.

Britomart's taking on of the role of rescuer, it should be noted, is itself an act of interpretation, and one whose importance outshines that of the ambiguous

details inside the castle which she leaves uninterpreted. For she assumes this role not simply as a knight errant redressing a "gentle Ladies helplesse misery" (III.xi.18) -- although this is part of the role that she plays -- but specifically in response to Scudamore's lament at the apparent failure of God, the "soueraigne Lord", to relieve the "good and righteous" with his "grace" (III.xi.9-10); in effect, she interprets her own appearance on the scene as having been brought about by the "heauenly grace" for which Scudamore prays (III.xi.14), much as the narrator made similar interpretations of Arthur's arrival on the scene in Books One and Two, and of Proteus's appearance in response to Florimell's prayer earlier in Book Three. By interpreting herself, in advance of the rescue attempt, as a heaven-sent rescuer -- that is, as playing the most exalted part that a knight in The Faerie Queene can assume -- she not only makes the success of the mission possible by giving herself, as it were prophetically, a sufficiently high standard to live up to, but she paves the way for her being received by others with the most hyperbolic appreciations that a knight can be given:

> Ah gentlest knight aliue, (said *Scudamore*)
> What huge heroicke magnanimity
> Dwels in thy bounteous brest?
>
> (III.xi.19).

And a little later, from Amoret:

> Your vertue selfe her owne reward shall breed,
> Euen immortall praise, and glory wide,
> Which I your vassall, by your prowesse freed,
> Shall through the world make to be notifyde...
>
> (III.xii.39)

Insofar as the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene is concerned, Britomart's assumption of the role of heavenly rescuer is an unqualified success, for she returns that role at last to the decisively beneficial impact that it had in Arthur's appearances in Books One and Two, but which has not been seen throughout Book Three. In the 1596 edition, of course, matters will be somewhat different; for there, Amoret's rescue will not lead immediately to a reunion with her beloved Scudamore, but to a series of further trials, and Britomart's rapturous reception as the agent of divine grace will quickly give way to widespread speculation (IV.i.4,47-49,*etc.*) that the knight who has rescued Amoret, like so many others in the Legend of Chastity, has himself laid claim to the lady as his prize for having rescued her. The reputation which Britomart cultivates for herself so successfully in Book Three will thus become subject to slander in Book Four, even as the ambiguity of her appearance, which she has used so consistently to her advantage in the Legend of Chastity, itself begins to work against her.

It is perhaps fitting that the third book of The Faerie Queene, in which ambiguity figures so prominently, should have two distinct endings, each so different from

the other in its implications for the hero. What is more striking still is the number of details, which are present even in the 1590 poem, that contribute effectively to each of these different sets of implications in turn. The most notable of these, I think, are the questions which Scudamore and Amoret pose, amid their rapturous praises of Britomart, concerning her relationship to the woman whom she has undertaken to rescue: Scudamore, when Britomart declares her commitment to the adventure, asks, "what couldst thou more,/ If she were thine, and thou as now am I?" (III.xi.19); Amoret, upon being rescued, asks, "what worthy meed/ Can wretched Lady, quit from wofull state,/ Yield you in liew of this your gratious deed?" (III.xii.39). In the 1596 poem, the irony of these innocent questions will soon become clear, as Amoret comes to fear that there is indeed something which she might be expected to give her rescuer as a reward for her freedom (IV.i.6-8), and Scudamore, that Britomart has indeed made Amoret her own (IV.i.47-53). But in the 1590 version of the story, this irony is not present; for the innocence with which Scudamore and Amoret wonder how Britomart can be rewarded for her gracious pains will have no opportunity to be tempered by doubtful experience. Rather, as Arthur, in Book One, fully merited the innocence with which Una offered her "simple selfe" to him as his reward for having rescued her

beloved knight (I.viii.27), so the Britomart of the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene fully deserves the trust that is placed in her when she takes upon herself the supreme chivalric role of heaven-sent rescuer. For a character whose method, throughout her adventures, has been to make claims for herself first and to set about to live up to them afterward, to be found trustworthy in this self-description is perhaps the greatest possible sign of her success. This episode forms a striking culmination, then, to the pattern of her ever-increasing control over the advance reporting of her own deeds and over her ability to live up to the reports that she gives of herself. It also brings her adventures in her own book to a close with an adventure, and a role, never prophesied for her by Merlin -- rather than, as in the cases of Redcross and Guyon, with the completion of the quest that was assigned at the outset. On one hand, the fact that she has yet to complete her quest is a source of sadness, "that fate n'ould let her yet possesse" her goal (III.xii.46); but on the other hand, the fact that she achieves another quest, assigned to another knight, is an indication that she has at last fulfilled the subversive possibility which she raised in putting on Angela's armour, of usurping the masculine role which she was meant merely to imitate, and that she has, thereby, stepped over the line that was meant to delimit her destiny.

Notes to Chapter 3: The Legend of Chastity

[1] As noted by Hamilton, in The Faerie Queene III.ii.24n, and Paglia (1990) 183.

[2] See also Van Dyke 269: "Merlin claims that the forces directing Britomart are rational and benign... But Merlin seeks confirmation of his grand claim in a secular, linear vision of history, thus placing the claim beyond ultimate confirmation".

[3] As noted by Hamilton, in The Faerie Queene III.ii.40n.

[4] As suggested by Wofford (1988) 1.

[5] Variorum Vol. 3, pp. 55-8 quotes Harper, who examines the chronicle sources (Caxton, Grafton, Holinshed, *etc.*) of "the Saxon Queen Angela, for whom England was named".

[6] As Lewis observes (1938) 313, "Night is hardly ever mentioned by Spenser without aversion".

[7] A convention at least as old as Ovid, who wrote that "Love is a kind of warfare [*militiae species amor est*]" (Ars Amatoria II.233). Regarding the force of the convention for Spenser and the Elizabethans generally, see Roche 55-6.

[8] See also Silberman 17-18, who argues for the spuriousness of this moral ideal.

[9] The paradox that "Love increases the valiance and nobility of the lover" while at the same time reducing him to "a willing slave" is a convention traceable to Provencal poetry of the eleventh century -- see Earle B. Fowler 1.

[10] Compare, for example, Spenser's "Amoretti" 67, and its Petrarchan model, *Una candida cerva* (Canzoniere 190); see also Ovid's Ars Amatoria I.45-50.

[11] Compare, for example, Spenser's "Amoretti" 34, and its Petrarchan model, *Passa la nave mia* (Canzoniere 189).

[12] For the courtly convention of love as a life-threatening illness see, for example, Earle B. Fowler, p.1.

[13] As argued by Miller 225.

[14] See also DeNeef 165, who attributes this error of interpretation to Timias rather than to Belphoebe.

[15] It is a convention ultimately traceable to Ovid to point out the non-literal status of love-wounds, which unlike ordinary wounds are "free from deadly blood [*a mortifero sanguine... carent*]" (Remedia Amoris, line 26). See for example the extensive debate which the smitten Alisandre carries on with himself in Chretien de Troyes's "Cliges" (Chretien 131) as to the sense in which he can be said to have been wounded by Love's arrow, given that "no cut or bruise appears".

[16] There are, of course, precedents for treating love as literally an illness, and its effects on the lover as medical symptoms -- thus, for example, Dino del Garbo's fourteenth-century commentary on Guido Cavalcanti's Canzone d'amore proclaims that in certain circumstances "love may be called a sickness, and medical authors who fix the limits of sicknesses and of their cures treat of this passion and even of its cure" (Trans. John Charles Nelson, p. 37) -- but generally the symptoms which are referred to are such as the "chaunge of hew" (I.ix.16) which Arthur is seen to suffer on thinking of his lady (compare Nelson's list of conventional *alterationes*, p.37), not the kind which are so truly incapacitating and so truly indistinguishable from the effects of a festering wound as those which Timias suffers.

[17] For an example of the convention, see Chretien 131; see also Earle B. Fowler, p. 37.

[18] C. S. Lewis, (1938) 129, observes that the two possible emphases are those of the two authors of the Romance of the Rose, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, respectively. See also Berger (1989) 253.

[19] Miller 227-8. See also Berger (1989) 253, who sees the point of the apparently literal-minded treatment of Belphoebe's "Rose" (III.v.51) as lying in the humour

that results from any attempt to take the stanza figuratively; but note that it is equally possible to take the passage straight as the description of a literal flower -- see for example Hamilton's marginal comment, III.v.51n.

Hamilton, incidentally, tries to prune this semantic thicket with the suggestion that "The Rose suggests her virginity but is not equated with it" (III.v.51n); but the poem will not ultimately support any such rationalization. The rose *is* equated with Belphoebe's virginity; but it also seems to exist literally as a flower. We might compare the strangeness of this situation with that of Guyon's literal encounter with a lady who actually symbolizes his own "Shamefastnesse" (II.ix.43 -- see Chapter Two, pp. 249-51).

[20] My view differs from that of DeNeef 165, who assumes that Belphoebe would offer Timias her "sweet cordial and sovereign salve" if she understood what it was that really ailed him. DeNeef does not seem to take into account the fact that "She did *enuy* that soueraigne salue" to the squire (III.v.50 -- my emphasis), nor, more generally, that she is not likely to be so completely innocent as he supposes of the possibility of erotic interest in her, given, for example, her prior experience of the lustful behaviour of Braggadochio (II.iii.42).

[21] As noted by Berger (1988) 467.

[22] A related point is made by Paglia, (1990) 185-6, who argues, for different reasons, that Florimell should be seen as a character who "inspires attack".

[23] For the Ovidian nature of the relationship between Paridell and Hellenore, see Earle B. Fowler, pp. 87-90.

[24] See Hamilton's note in The Faerie Queene III.viii.29n, and Giamatti 68-9 & 121 on Proteus's appearance in the eighth canto of Book Three, the place reserved in other books for "the intercession of Arthur as the power of grace".

[25] Ovid, Metamorphoses, *passim*; on Spenser's use of the Ovidian rape motif, see Paglia (1990) 185.

[26] My choice of the word 'unretracted' to characterize the pagan vision of love, both in Book Three generally and the Garden of Adonis in particular, is influenced by Spenser's own use of the word "retractation", in the prefatory letter to his "Fowre Hymnes", to describe the relationship between the first two (essentially pagan) hymns and the corresponding Christian poems: "I resolved at least to amend, and by

way of retractation to reforme them, making in stead of those two Hymnes of earthly or naturall love and beautie, two others of heavenly and celestiall." If anything in Spenser's poetry might be described as a "retractation" of the Garden of Adonis, it is, surely, the judgement of Nature in the Mutabilitie Cantos; but this is a topic whose discussion I must reserve for a different place.

[27] Josephine Waters Bennett and Brents Stirling argue, in different ways, for the philosophical coherence of the Garden, Denis Saurat against (see the summaries in Variorum Vol. 3, pp. 344-52 and Hankins 235-9); more recently, Robert Ellrodt and William Nelson have found the Garden philosophically coherent ("...the myth of the Garden certainly depends upon some systematic theory of generation" -- Nelson 209), while Graham Hough has revived Saurat's position: "...I believe with Denis Saurat that the attempt to read [the passage] as a systematic essay in natural philosophy is bound to fail" (pp. 176-7).

[28] Compare the positions of Miller 220 and Tonkin 119, both of whom see the description of the Garden as deliberately ambiguous, but for somewhat different reasons than the ones that I shall be offering.

[29] Compare Miller 261.

[30] The resemblance of the two gardens' names is noted by Hamilton (in The Faerie Queene, III.vi.30-50n), the resemblance of their physical descriptions by Bennett (see Variorum Vol. 3, pp. 346) and Hamilton (in The Faerie Queene, III.vi.34.7-9n). See also Hankins 238, 277-86.

[31] Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, 8.1.1-2. It has been supposed by Ellrodt 77*ff*, William Nelson 209-10, and Hankins 238, that this work may have influenced Spenser in his composition of the Garden of Adonis passage; but it has not been observed, I think, that the key question which this work addresses and which gives it its title may also be of relevance to understanding the Garden of Adonis.

[32] Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis 8.4.8; see also 8.5.10.

[33] Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis 8.1.4.

[34] Hankins 239 cites many critics who have suggested that the garden represents the body or the womb; Bennett argues that it is the place of unembodied forms (see Variorum Vol. 3, p. 346), Ellrodt 82 and Hankins 269-74

that it is the place of "vegetable" (or "vegetal") "souls".

[35] See, as well, Augustine's citing of the *earthiness* of Eden, and of the man placed in it, as indications of their having had a literal, corporeal existence -- The Literal Meaning of Genesis 8.1.1-2.

[36] Nohrnberg 530 allows that this is one of the Garden's meanings.

[37] Tonkin 121. See also Miller 261.

[38] Upton (see Variorum Vol. 3, pp. 256-7), Saurat (see Variorum Vol. 3, p. 344) and Bennett (see Variorum Vol. 3, p. 346) take the "babes" to be rational souls; Ellrodt 82, disagreeing, suggests seminal reasons or vegetative souls; William Nelson 211*ff*, citing Plotinus and Ficino, takes them to be seminal reasons; Hankins 269-74 understands them to be vegetative (or "vegetal") souls.

[39] Plato, Republic 615a; Virgil, Aeneid 6.743-51; the regular citation of these two works as sources for the passage in question in noted by William Nelson 215.

[40] Miller 262.

[41] The "babes" and "substances" were identified in this way by Brents Stirling (see Variorum Vol. 3, pp. 349-50, 351).

[42] Hamilton (in The Faerie Queene III.vi.39n) correctly rejects the arguments of those (including Ellrodt, Lewis, and Tonkin) who try to place Time's ravages outside the Garden.

[43] Commentators who reject the equation of the "babes" with the "substances" include Saurat (see Variorum Vol. 3, p. 344), Bennett (1942) 53, W. Nelson 216, and Hankins 238.

[44] This line of reasoning is followed by Josephine Waters Bennett (1942) 57-58.

[45] Compare the reading of Miller 269-72.

[46] Aeneid 6, esp. ll.743-51. See also Hamilton, in The Faerie Queene III.vi.33.5n.

[47] Stirling (1934) 536-7, and Hankins 237-8, who cites precedents from Ficino to bolster Stirling's case, see Venus as the source of matter; Stirling draws the

conclusion that, in this passage, the roles of Venus and of Chaos are identical -- indeed, that Venus and Chaos are identical.

[48] Somewhat the same point regarding the literal meaning of this episode is made by Kouwenhoven 95-7, although his view of the relation between literal and figurative meanings in allegory is quite different from mine. The reality, for the characters in the story, of the literal meaning of what happens in the House of Busirane, is denied, against the evidence of the text, by DeNeef 170-1.

[49] Thus for example the loves of Arthur (I.ix.10-12) and Britomart (III.ii.23,26, 35-36); see also Earle B. Fowler 1-2. For the sources of Cupid's triumphal procession see Ovid, Amores I.ii, and Petrarch's "Triumph of Love".

[50] Thus Lewis, (1938) 341*ff*, sees in the episode a rejection of the negative courtly love tradition in favour of a positive ideal of married love.

[51] In spite of some critics' claims to the contrary: see, for example, Tonkin 131.

Conclusion

We have seen that, in all three books of the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene, the protagonists become involved in the interpretation of their own stories.

In Book One, the primary problem which such interpretation addresses is that of *guidance*, that is, of knowing what is to be done and finding the motivation to carry it through. An important source of such motivation was found to reside in the existence of a community of virtuous interests which undertakes to reward the good deeds of its members by enshrining a favourable interpretation of those deeds in its collective memory -- in other words, in the prospect of fame.

Book Two takes up as a central theme this concern, which emerges toward the end of Book One, with *report*, that is, with the interpretation of deeds after the event. In Guyon's adventures (or misadventures), we saw both a reiteration of the importance of community to the proper choice of undertakings and to favourable reception of good deeds, as well as a warning of the pressures,

exerted through false reports and malicious misinterpretations, that threaten to fragment such a community of virtuous intentions. Like Holinshed in his Preface to the Reader of his Chronicles, the Legend of Temperance stresses, above all, that dissention within the group will always leave it vulnerable to its enemies, and is therefore to be avoided at all costs.[1]

In Book Three, the themes of guidance and report, which are central to Books One and Two respectively, are united in the theme of *prophecy* -- or a kind of report which, because it is offered before the fact, is able to play a guiding role in the development of the events so reported. Here the collective project of history-making, which had served well the interests of the Redcross knight, is seen rather differently from the perspective of a virtuous outsider: described now as a specifically male institution, it threatens with its partiality toward its own interests (its concern with its "proper prayse") to belittle rather than to magnify the accomplishments of the female knight Britomart (III.ii.1-2). Accordingly, the emphasis shifts, in Book Three, from the interpretive power of the community onto that of the individual: in the person and adventures of Britomart, the Legend of Chastity explores the limits of one person's capacity to make a good name *for herself*.

The success which Britomart has in this regard, while impressive, can only be provisional: in her further

adventures, in the 1596 installment of The Faerie Queene, even she will become the victim of misrepresentation and misinterpretation, and will need to return to the fold of the community -- a community which does intend to glorify her, but on its own terms, in a role subordinate to that of her husband and offspring. While, by her final adventure in Book Three, Britomart shows herself capable of laying claim even to God's backing in asserting the virtuousness of her own 'freelance' undertakings, in subsequent books it is God's purposes for the nation to which she belongs which will assert their claim upon her.

In a sense, the full course of Britomart's adventures will repeat the pattern established in the Legend of Holiness. Like the Redcross knight, Britomart must pass beyond a stage of knight-errantry, with its ethic of mere self-glorification, to acknowledge the providential purpose which she served in donning armour and knighthood in the first place. For Britomart, however, the alternatives are not so starkly presented as for Redcross, in whose adventure errantry was revealed to be straightforwardly equivalent to waywardness and sin, and for whom only the completion of his quest could lead to real glory. On one hand, Britomart finds a significant degree of glory even in knight-errantry -- sufficient to sustain her good name through the whole of her own book, and to produce a climactic adventure in the House of Busirane whose virtuousness commentators have always

lauded rather than doubted (in sharp contrast to Guyon, whose reputation is not secure among critics in spite of his faithful adherence to the task set for him). On the other hand, completing her quest entails, for Britomart, a significant compromise of the glorious self-sufficiency to which she has attained *en route*.

In passing from the adventures of the Redcross knight to those of the Briton princess, we seem to be moving through an imaginary world which increasingly reflects the moral complexity of the world that Spenser might have known as reality: a world wherein God's purposes for a nation -- even for a 'chosen' nation -- tend to be revealed with neither the clarity nor the finality that characterizes the Redcross knight's battle with the dragon, but seem rather to include setbacks as well as advances, aims which are hidden or ambiguous as well as those which are manifest. Like Merlin's prophecy to Britomart, the Elizabethan state's casting of Queen Elizabeth (and therefore of itself) as the vehicle of God's purposes on earth entailed a "grand claim" -- namely, "that the forces directing her, and thus directing history, are rational and benign" -- a claim, like Merlin's, for which the ambivalent facts of history could never provide an "ultimate confirmation".[2] But the increasing moral complexity of the imaginary world presented by The Faerie Queene does not, it seems to me, entail a subversion of this "grand claim" in favour of a

more relativistic reading of political realities, nor, more generally, does it require us to see the poem as turning skeptically against the idealism of its opening book: on the contrary, even in that first book, as we have seen, idealism is tempered by a considerable dose of pragmatism; and it is, I think, a pragmatic grappling with the difficulty of perceiving (much less realizing) the ideal in a fallen world, rather than a cynical assault on that ideal, which takes us, as the poem continues, into regions wherein the purposes of God come to seem increasingly ambivalent and obscure. The nature of virtuous action may become more difficult to ascertain as we pass from one book to the next; the degree to which success is possible and the quality of earthly rewards may falter; there may even emerge the necessity of compromise between the interests of the individual and of the group in which that individual's hopes of earthly fame reside. But so far as the poem puts a stake in any earthly thing, it is in the moral order which inheres (however imperfectly) in the existing, hierarchical social order, not in one which subverts or undermines it.

The increasing moral complexity of the imaginary world presented in successive books of The Faerie Queene manifests itself principally in the increasing difficulty of interpreting this world, both for its inhabitants and for the poem's readers. This presentation of the world as increasingly difficult to interpret is effected, in

turn, largely through an increasingly complex relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of the poem's imagery -- that is, through the increasing complexity of the poem's allegory.

In Book One, the allegory consists chiefly in the presentation of secular or earthly things (knighthood, the quest, and so on) as symbols of the heavenly or sacred; learning to read this world properly was a matter of recognizing and responding to the simultaneous truth and importance of both 'levels' of meaning.

In Book Two, recognizing the symbolic nature of experience and responding to the doubleness of meaning remains important, as does the project of searching in the earthly (for example, in the genealogy of the kings of Britain) for a heavenly significance; but the two things are no longer systematically aligned as they were in the Legend of Holiness. On the contrary, figurative meaning itself tends to be as earthly as the literal -- whether, for example, in a castle which symbolizes the human body, or in a "Babes bloudie hands" for which the Palmer insists on finding a secular rather than a religious significance (II.ii.Arg. & 4-10) -- and the frequently-expressed aim of enrolling earthly deeds in heaven is left, as it were, to fend for itself, without the aid of the kind of symbolism according to which the Redcross knight was "chosen" simultaneously to serve purposes both human and divine, and according to which

earthly and heavenly fame were therefore intertwined.

In Book Three, yet again, success in undertakings depends on the apprehension, on one hand, of the relation of literal to figurative meanings, and, on the other, of heaven's purposes in the world; but not only (as in the second book) do figurative meanings not ordinarily correspond to the heavenly, as they did in Book One, but the relation between literal and figurative itself becomes so vexed that often it is not possible for characters to control the precise meaning either of words (such as the words of Proteus's prophecy, or Florimell's words to the fisherman) or of the things that make up their immediate sense experience (such as the wounds suffered by Timias and Amoret). The impossibility of deciding whether given words pertain to one literally or figuratively or both, or whether a given thing is a symbol or not, frequently render the detailed significance of the various characters' experience -- and of ours as readers -- genuinely uninterpretable. Heaven does still have a role to play in all this; not, however, (as in Book One), in the sense of creating a clear analogy and correspondence between its own purposes and the purposes of the virtuous on earth, but rather in deliberately contriving the very "double senses" which *confound* the attempt to interpret earthly experience -- double senses which, while they do ultimately advance heaven's purposes on earth, in doing so also render those

purposes largely "vnknowen" to mortals (III.iv.28).

What Books One to Three have in common is that, in each case, the nature of the allegory is inseparable from the nature of its characters' experience: the structure of the allegory is the shape of their world, just as the structure of medieval and Renaissance exegesis constituted the medieval and Renaissance world picture (see Introduction (1): p. 54). Spenser's symbolic world is not, by any means, identical in its structure to this other imaginary symbolic world; it is not, in this sense, a piece of realism, even by sixteenth-century standards. Nevertheless, the experience of its characters may have a great deal to do with the kinds of experience involved in real life as Spenser knew it.[3] To try to substantiate this point, I would like to conclude with one final look at the way in which Spenser frames his poem for public presentation by means of the dedicatory sonnets and that favourite crux of Spenser criticism, the Letter to Raleigh.

As we have already noted, it is likely that one important factor in determining the ways in which the Letter to Raleigh and the dedicatory sonnets describe the workings of the poem was Spenser's acute awareness of the degree to which favourable or unfavourable interpretations of the poem by those in power were likely to be based on these readily graspable expressions of its nature and his intention (Introduction (2): p. 97).[4]

What we may now add to this picture is a recognition of just how closely the need for such a politic presentation of his own story resembles what is often required of characters within the poem -- and especially of the Redcross knight upon his own completion, in a different sense, of a major installment of the same story. Like Redcross at the court of Una's parents, Spenser in the Letter to Raleigh makes his best case for a tale which, in spite of good intentions, is not above the reach of detractors, by emphasizing its worthy qualities (it is an instrument of praise and a persuader to virtue) and passing lightly over its moral complexities. Interestingly, I think, as a part of this project of representing his own deed in the best possible light, Spenser makes the best case also for the principal knights within his story, describing them as straightforward exemplars or even personifications of their respective virtues, without any indication that any or all of them must in any respect *learn* their virtues in the course of their adventures. Thus, for example, the account of the Redcross knight simply as a character "in whome I expresse Holynes" surpasses, as a favourable gloss on the knight's story, anything to which either the knight himself or the narrator within the poem can attain. In thus perfecting his knights' reputations, Spenser makes himself, in a sense, their allies: for just as he fulfils, more fully and (as some have thought)

more authoritatively than in any other place their interest in being favourably received, so too their favourable appearance reflects well on the poet who adduces their exemplary qualities as evidence of his moral intention in writing the poem. In a real sense, then, the community of interests which includes the various knights of The Faerie Queene expands, in the Letter to Raleigh, to embrace its author as well.

Spenser further shows himself to be aware of the importance of community membership to the favourable reception of his deeds by the extent to which he represents his poem as serving the real-life community of interests of the Elizabethan court, which is to him what Faery Court is to his imaginary knights: namely, the place where his story must be favourably received if he is to receive the glory and fame which are the due reward of his loyal service. By means both of the dedicatory sonnets and of the Letter to Raleigh, Spenser represents his poem as addressed to the specific interests of Elizabethan courtiers.

So far as the sonnets go, the poet's claim that his poem serves the interests of their particular addressees is probably, for the most part, show rather than substance -- a rhetorical gesture recognizing the importance, in general, of such relationships of mutual interest, rather than a factual indication of his supposing that the specific courtiers addressed have

anything personally to gain from the favourable reception of his poem.

With the Letter to Raleigh, however, the case may be somewhat different. In particular, if the recent article by Jean R. Brink is correct in arguing that the Letter was written in January 1589, not in January 1590 as is usually supposed, then we would need to see it, not (like the dedicatory sonnets) as a composition custom-designed for the occasion of publication, but rather as the reprinting of a genuine piece of correspondence occasioned by Raleigh's interest in the poem while both men were still living in Ireland.[5] Raleigh, having seen the poem in manuscript and conceived of the notion of taking Spenser and The Faerie Queene to court as a kind of present for the queen, may well genuinely have "commanded" the poet to produce such a summary apology for his work, in order to see how the present (whose interpretation at court was otherwise as unpredictable as the poem itself was sprawling and complicated) might be neatly gift-wrapped the better to assure its favourable reception. If such were the case, then the subsequent printing of the Letter along with the poem would indicate Raleigh's satisfaction with the result of his experiment, and his wish to see the poem presented as convincingly to its general readership as it had been to himself. (Nor is it difficult to imagine, I think, that Raleigh might have used an actual reading of this "Letter of the

Authors" in introducing the poet and his poem to the queen herself: 'Your majesty, I have on purpose kept this letter of the author's about me, with the thought that you may find it interesting to hear in brief his intention in writing, as he expressed it to me on my own first acquaintance with the poem...'). Spenser, for his part, shows himself in the Letter to be anything but reluctant to be "so... commanded" by Raleigh: such an apology is something which he himself had "thought good" to produce, "for auoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions". The poet knows that it is in his own interest, as much as in the interest of the patron who will give him access to the queen, to see his poem well received when presented at court. In the Letter to Raleigh, then, we may have a partial record of a real-life alliance of mutual interest such as appears so prominently in the poem itself, in which two men seeking fame and glory "friendly each did others prayse deuize/ How to aduance with fauourable hands" (I.ix.1). If such is the case, then it is indeed fitting that Spenser's "gathering the whole intention of the conceit" of The Faerie Queene should be presented as a Letter to Raleigh -- that is, as an instance of the workings of such a virtuous alliance in real life.

Notes to Conclusion

[1] Holinshed Vol. 2, A3^{v}-4^{r} (pages unnumbered in this gathering); see also Levy 184, Stephen Booth 13-15.

[2] This characterization of Merlin's prophecy is taken from Van Dyke 269. See also Chapter Two, pp. 294-5 & 346-8.

[3] As suggested (though not of Spenser's experience specifically) by Williams (1966) xiii, for whom the quality of the experience of the characters in Faery land is "very close to what it feels like to be living in a world whose significance is only dimly and occasionally discernible". See also MacCaffrey 47, for whom "Spenserian narrative... mimes the epistemological experience of fallen man".

[4] See Erickson 152-5.

[5] Brink 219: "all substantive evidence indicates that the 'Letter to Ralegh', which is internally dated 23 January 1589 in the 1590 printed edition of the Faerie Queene, should not be arbitrarily modernized to 1590. Thus, Spenser wrote the 'Letter to Ralegh' nearly a year before the Faerie Queene was entered in the Stationers' register." Also pertinent to my argument is 224n: "We need not assume that Spenser and Ralegh first became acquainted in 1589. Ralegh, like Spenser, accompanied Arthur Lord Grey to Ireland in 1580. Moreover, Ralegh was in Munster in the autumn of 1588".

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